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In 1772 the religious situation in the colony of North Carolina was one of neglect and tension. The Church of England had been established by law since 1715, but it provided few priests to minister to the people and failed to offer the type of services that the colonists found meaningful. There were dissenting sects in North Carolina also, and the supporters of these groups objected to paying taxes for the maintenance of a church which they did not approve of. These were the circumstances encountered by Joseph Pilmoor, the first Methodist itinerant to tour the colony.

The Methodist movement that Pilmoor represented was unique. It had many of the advantages of the dissenting Protestant groups, and similarly stressed conversion, moral improvement, a called ministry, and meetings providing fellowship and emotional release. Yet, it was a reform movement within the Anglican Church, and it emphasized loyalty to that institution. As a result, some Anglican priests cooperated with the Methodist itinerants in America in the establishment of societies and circuits.

John Wesley, a priest of the Church of England, had organized the Methodist movement in Great Britain in 1744, and colonists who had been Wesleyans established the first societies in America during the 1760's. Thus, Methodism was introduced during the period of religious revivals known as

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the Great Awakening. Although the early Methodists lived in the North, between 1775 and 1785 the movement had its greatest success in the South. The scarcity of churches, the unsuitability of many Anglican clergymen, and the absence of war activity between 1776 and 1780 combined to make North Carolina fertile soil for Methodism.

By examining the success of the Methodist movement in North Carolina, it is possible to illustrate how its missionaries worked on the frontier. Their message and methods can be explained. Also, the failures of the Anglican Church can be demonstrated by comparing the two. The time period selected is from 1772 when the first itinerant preached in North Carolina to 1785 when the first annual conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church met near Louisburg, North Carolina. This same time span saw the growth of political tension between Great Britain and America, and it is possible to trace the effects this had on Methodism, still essentially a British-controlled movement. During this Revolutionary era, many American Methodists began to work for an independent church, and their progress is traced. An explanation of the schism caused by North Carolina and Virginia preachers in 1779 is included, and this temporary break was a warning of the permanent one to come in 1785.

The development of Methodism is significant in the history of North Carolina, and events which took place there were important in the growth of the Methodist movement.

APPROVAL STATEMENT

This thesis has been approved by the following

THE INTRODUCTION OF METHODISM INTO NORTH CAROLINA
" 1772-1785
University of North Carolina at Greensboro.

by

Gayle Hicks Fripp
" "

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the Faculty of the Graduate School at
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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Chapter	Page
INTRODUCTION	1

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Joseph Pilgrimage Introduces Methodism in 1772	
The Roles of Robert Williams and Governor Perrott	
in the Virginia Festival of 1773	
American Methodism Adopts the Annual Conference,	
1773-1775	
Political Tension Between Great Britain and the	
American Colonies Influences Methodism, 1775	
Early Methodist Preachers on the North Carolina	
Circuit, 1776-1778	
The Schism Over the Sacraments, 1779	
Francis Asbury Leads in Mission, 1780-1782	
Asbury Tours in North Carolina, 1783-1784	

VI. The Establishment of the Methodist Episcopal	
Church	165
VII. Conclusions	118

PART III. REFERENCES

VIII. Bibliographic Essay	120
IX. Bibliography	125

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Chapter	Page
INTRODUCTION	1

PART I. METHODIST BEGINNINGS

I.	The Origin of Methodism in Great Britain . . .	4
II.	The Great Awakening	19
III.	The Origin of Methodism in America	25

PART II. THE INTRODUCTION AND DEVELOPMENT OF METHODISM IN NORTH CAROLINA

IV.	Religion in North Carolina Before the Methodists	40
V.	The Progress of Methodism in the Colony and State of North Carolina	51

Joseph Pilmoor Introduces Methodism in 1772
The Roles of Robert Williams and Devereux Jarratt
in the Virginia Revival of 1773
American Methodism Adopts the Annual Conference,
1773-1775
Political Tension Between Great Britain and the
American Colonies Influences Methodism, 1775
Early Methodist Preachers on the North Carolina
Circuits, 1776-1778
The Schism Over the Sacraments, 1779
Francis Asbury Leads in Reunion, 1780-1782
Asbury Tours in North Carolina, 1783-1784

VI.	The Establishment of the Methodist Episcopal Church	105
VII.	Conclusions	118

PART III. REFERENCES

VIII.	Bibliographic Essay	120
IX.	Bibliography	125

PART IV. APPENDIXES

Appendix A	
The General Rules of the Methodist Episcopal Church	133
Appendix B	
The Wesleyan Missionaries	136
Appendix C	
The Annual Conferences, 1773-1784	137
Appendix D	
The North Carolina Circuits, 1776-1784	138

Out of the crowd gathered at the front steps of Currituck Court House a young man came forward and asked permission of the people to preach. The men and women who had assembled there for a religious service gratefully accepted his offer and urged him to begin, for there were few ministers, either of the Anglican Church or the dissenting sects, in eastern North Carolina in 1772. The text was announced, "He shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost, and with fire" (Matthew 3:11); the message that followed was one of love and reconciliation. The stranger then introduced himself as Joseph Pilmoor, a missionary to the American colonies sent by the British Conference of Methodist Societies. He explained that he and all Methodists were loyal to the Church of England and hoped to extend its influence by preaching and teaching in every possible place. His sermon was the first by a Methodist lay preacher in the colony, and the event is a significant one in any treatment of North Carolina church history. The Anglicans, Baptists and others who heard him that day had wondered how he came to be among them, and the brief explanation that he gave them will be examined and expanded in this study.

Pilmoor arrived in North Carolina when the colony and its settlers were practically unaffected by the Church of England, which had been established by law since 1715.

A few Anglican ministers had worked in the area, and the apparent failure of these missionaries and the weakness of the Church were problems that had been reported numerous times to imperial authorities who governed the royal colonies and to the Bishop of London who was responsible for religious affairs in all the colonies. William Tryon, governor from 1765 until 1771, was concerned with this situation and had written to the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts (S. P. G.) during his first year: "No British colony on this continent stands more, or so much in need of regular moral clergymen as this does."¹ His request for missionaries was not acted upon during his tenure, and the circumstances did not improve greatly after 1771. A scarcity of S. P. G. volunteers and the rising political tension between Great Britain and her colonies probably were responsible. Was Joseph Pilmoor finally one of these needed "regular moral clergymen"? Governor Tryon and other influential Anglicans probably did not judge him as such, since their Church viewed the Methodist revival with distrust. Doubtless, a majority of Carolina settlers had more respect for him than for an Anglican bishop, however, since the Established Church had done little to

¹W. L. Saunders, ed., Colonial Records of North Carolina (10 vols.; Raleigh: Josephus Daniels, 1886-90), VII, 103.

The activity in North Carolina of the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts will be discussed below, pp. 45-46.

bring religion to them. The reasons for this difference in attitude toward a Methodist missionary are related to the condition of religion in North Carolina in this era and should be explained.

This paper will trace the progress of Methodism in the colony and state of North Carolina from its introduction in 1772 until the first annual conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church was held near Louisburg, North Carolina, in April, 1785. With the movement established as a national denomination, the first phase of its development in America ended. Some considerations in this treatment must deal with the rise of Methodism in Great Britain and other areas of America as this affected the situation in North Carolina. Wherever this revival was successful, it influenced politics and economics as well as religious and social life. In America it met a need that the English Church did not recognize and could not satisfy.

The Origin of Methodism in Great Britain

In the beginning Methodism was a missionary movement and separate fellowship within the Anglican Church. It was not a new sect, and its leaders, who were ordained by the Church of England, had no desire to separate from that Church and its traditional beliefs. Methodism was a reform movement to meet the needs of not only the poor and neglected but also of those who desired to lead a more Christlike life. Eighteenth-century England with its concern for pleasure and privilege and its lack of concern for social and economic evils was a suitable environment for the rise of such a revival.

A major aim of Methodism was to encourage further growth on the part of each individual that it reached. An increased understanding of scripture and an acceptance of Christ as a model for one's life were the goals of the spiritual education which was provided in regular meetings. Moral improvement was to come from the acceptance of a set of rules drawn up to aid converts in self-discipline. It was thought that the stronger members in an organized group could aid the weaker in abiding by these rules and thus encourage better conduct. It was also hoped that a sense of fellowship would develop among the Methodists who came together to learn and that this fellowship would sustain

attempts at improvement. John Wesley, the founder of this revival and a priest in the Anglican Church, held that every person should be able to read and interpret the Bible and other books the Methodist leaders were to make available. Therefore, adult education classes in reading were offered. Such classes were the forerunners of regular Sunday schools.

A second major concern of the Wesleyan movement was to extend the influence of Christianity within the community. If the Methodists could not use their new strength to reform their environment, their purpose was no different from that of the Moravian Brethren whom Wesley early admired and later criticized.² Methodism was not a theological revolt, and its rules stressed the importance of proper conduct, not proper belief. Although a majority of Methodists were Anglicans, there were some with other church connections. The Wesleyans even accepted the unaffiliated and unbaptized as workers, if their desire was for a stronger faith and a more disciplined life. They felt that the community could be improved by the cooperation of many persons who might differ on theological points.

The preachers and lay aides of Methodism carried out a third aim. They emphasized in their meetings the emotional aspects of religion which were absent in most of the Anglican services. These men felt it was necessary to experience an

²Wesley's connection and later break with the Moravians will be discussed briefly below, pp. 9-10, p. 12.

inner call by God before they could preach. They considered their mission to be an urgent one, and they traveled constantly to reach as many people as possible. Finally, they spoke without any notes and with great feeling. Their approach was quite a contrast to that of the Anglican priests who were assigned to parishes and who generally read their sermons. The Wesleyans also emphasized the importance of singing, and Charles Wesley, brother of John, wrote hundreds of hymns which were easy to sing and to remember. He worded his verses cleverly to include major doctrinal points.

People learned theology while they enjoyed the music. A special service used by the Methodists and other religious groups, but not by the Anglican Church, was the love feast. This fellowship meal, symbolic of brotherhood, stressed the eternal bond between Jesus Christ and his followers. Most Methodist sessions were a lively change for those participants who usually attended the restrained services of the Church of England.

To implement these various aims it was necessary to have some type of organization, and, as the Methodist movement developed, the religious society was adopted as a means of reaching the people. Each society was made up of approximately thirty men and women, and it was part of a traveling preacher's area. To become a member one had to express a desire for salvation and to accept the rules of discipline John Wesley had drawn up. To obey these General

Rules was evidence of one's good intentions. The Rules fell into three categories: ways of avoiding evil and wrongdoing, ways of doing good and of being kind, and a listing of the ordinances of God that should be attended regularly.³ The meetings of the societies were closed to outsiders unless they were potential converts, and even these people were limited to a certain number of visits. The society was valuable to the Wesleyans, because its meetings provided opportunities for sharing experiences and feelings and for stressing a mutuality of concern for all mankind. In Great Britain it became common practice to divide each society into small classes of men or women. A class leader was appointed to check regularly on the moral conduct of each member and to plan for weekly meetings. This unit was not effective in America, although it was used in different places at different times.

In summary, the purpose of the Methodist movement was not to replace the Anglican Church; in fact, most Methodists considered themselves better Anglicans as a result of being Methodists. The major functions of Methodism were to revitalize the Church of England and to use its laymen more effectively.

This religious system grew out of the expanding

³The General Rules of the Methodist Episcopal Church which remain the same as those first drawn up by Wesley are listed in Appendix A, pp. 133-35.

ministries of two brothers, John and Charles Wesley. George Whitefield, an early friend of the pair, also made significant contributions to Methodism, and his activity as its first successful missionary in America laid lasting foundations. Other men participated with the three in the organization of Methodism, and it took many leaders and followers to encourage its growth. However, without any controversy, historians have always designated John Wesley as the founder of and genius behind eighteenth-century Methodism.

John Wesley was born in the rectory at Epworth, England, on June 28, 1703. His father Samuel was an Anglican clergyman, and his mother Susannah was the daughter of a distinguished Congregational minister. As a result he was brought up in a religious and disciplined atmosphere, but there was little in John's early life to indicate that he planned to enter the ministry as his brother Samuel had done. In the summer of 1725, however, he read many works of religious philosophy and history, he converted a sick friend, and he accepted ordination as a deacon. For three years, while serving as a lecturer at Lincoln College, he aided his father as often as possible and came to understand the routine duties of a minister. Then, in 1728, having satisfied the necessary requirements which did not include any type of conversion experience, he was ordained a priest of the Church of England. Returning to Oxford as a student

in 1729, John hoped to see frequently his younger brother Charles, a lecturer there, but neither knew how important their meetings would become.

Charles Wesley, unlike his two brothers, was not yet ordained and had no desire to be; however, at this period he was probably more concerned with living a truly Christian life than Samuel or John. He had gathered a group of friends who met together to study the Bible, aid each other in spiritual advancement, and plan a life that would promote godliness. The group felt concern for the poor, as Jesus had, and they visited slums and prisons giving relief when this was possible. Other students sarcastically called them "the methodists" because they followed a strict routine, and the name intended as an insult was adopted by the circle. John Wesley, impressed with this fellowship, became its spokesman, and he directed the so-called "Holy Club" for six years. Then, in 1735, the Wesleys, who were eager to participate in the foreign mission field, offered their services to the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel and were sent to the new colony of Georgia. George Whitefield was temporarily leader of the original Methodist society at Oxford, but it disintegrated as he and its other members gradually relocated.

The two years spent as a missionary in Savannah were important if frustrating for John Wesley. He came in contact with Moravian Brethren for the first time and saw in their

personal approach to religion and complete faith in God things lacking in his own system of belief. Because he attempted to impose his orthodoxy on a frontier society of uneducated, struggling people, he failed. As a result, he began to question the traditions and restraints of the Church he represented. During this period of evaluation, he read of the successful religious revivals occurring in other parts of America, while he was trying unsuccessfully to convert the Indians and to set up societies for the Anglicans. Wesley left the colony in despair in 1737, though in 1738, George Whitefield, making his first trip to America, wrote from Savannah: "The good Mr. John Wesley has done in America, under God, is inexpressible. His name is very precious among the people; and he has laid such a foundation, that I hope neither men nor devils will ever be able to shake."⁴ Unfortunately, there is little to support this impression of Wesley's mission except the writer's friendship for the missionary and the scarcity of ministers in the southern colonies. Since so few Anglican priests came to the South at all, the efforts of Wesley, although unsuccessful, could be praised.⁵

⁴Emory Stevens Bucke, ed., The History of American Methodism (3 vols.; Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1964), I, 45.

⁵One historian of the Great Awakening does say that the eagerness of the Savannah people for any religious leadership was a contributing factor in the success of the movement, for it illustrated the readiness of the colonists for the revival. He feels that Wesley's attempt to provide

The return voyage to England gave time for reflection, and in the spring of 1738 Wesley joined a society of Anglicans in order to encourage further thought and to strengthen his changing convictions. He began to preach the doctrine of salvation by faith alone before he himself had a conversion experience. Then, on May 24, 1738, while at a society meeting in Aldersgate Street, he suddenly felt that Jesus Christ who had redeemed him as an individual should be trusted and followed without reserve. Wesley knew that others must feel as he did about the importance of conversion. He was not surprised, therefore, when a small group of Anglicans and Moravians approached him about meeting regularly with them for prayer and conference. It was agreed among them to hold Thursday evening sessions. Thus, in 1739, a Methodist society which would be permanent was begun. In such societies was the strength of the Wesleyan movement. George Whitefield recognized this too late and wrote regretfully: "My brother Wesley acted wisely. The souls that were awakened under his ministry he joined in class, and thus preserved the fruits of his labor. This I neglected, and my people are a rope of sand."⁶

this leadership was a contribution to the Awakening. Wesley W. Gewehr, The Great Awakening in Virginia (Durham: Duke University Press, 1930), pp. 6-7.

⁶William Larkin Duren, The Trail of the Circuit Rider (New Orleans: Chalmers' Printing House, 1936), p. 40.

By 1739 most of the Anglican churches had closed their doors to Wesley, whom they considered an agitator, and he left London for Bristol to take over the work started there by Whitefield, the first ordained Methodist to do field preaching. Wesley was very disturbed at the prospect of speaking outside a church building, but he took the Sermon on the Mount as a precedent, and broke with Anglican tradition. This kind of preaching converted many more people than a regular service, and, as Wesley began to gather believers in many different places, he saw the need for additional help and some type of organization.

During the year 1740 Methodism developed rapidly. By this time Wesley realized that it was necessary to separate from the Moravians who had been active in the early Wesleyan societies, because they were primarily interested in religion as an individual faith. Wesley considered the influence of Methodism on the community as a primary function of the movement. He also felt it necessary to take a stand against Calvinism, especially the doctrine of the elect, which was supported by influential Methodists, such as Whitefield and the Countess of Huntingdon. Wesley preferred to threaten the unity of Methodism rather than to accept a purpose or support a doctrine he felt was false.

Practical decisions were made in 1740 also. Laymen who accepted the Rules of Methodism and desired to further its aims were accepted as helpers. These men were often

uneducated in theology and philosophy, but they could influence others by reading the Bible and spreading its message. John Wesley feared the use of laymen, and he carefully screened persons who wanted to serve as itinerant preachers. If they satisfied his requirements, which were built around satisfactory personal conduct and a desire for salvation, he gave them a license to preach and to counsel, but only to other Wesleyans. Throughout his lifetime Wesley tried to have some of the best of these lay preachers ordained by the Church of England, but he never succeeded. The only ordained Methodist preachers from 1738 until 1784 were Anglican priests who joined the movement. This presented a problem which was unresolved for almost fifty years, since most Methodist preachers were not ordained and could neither baptize nor hold communion.

The employment of these laymen as preachers gave Wesley the necessary manpower to set up an itinerant system. The scattered societies were organized into circuits, and each year one or two preachers were assigned to ride over the area and aid the societies in that district. John Wesley himself was an outstanding example of an itinerant or circuit rider. He traveled approximately one quarter of a million miles in fifty years.

Another organizational step was taken in 1744 when the first conference of all the Wesleyan societies in Great Britain was held to make necessary business decisions and

to provide a time of worship for the men who usually led services. This conference drew up a set of rules (those proposed by Wesley) to be accepted by society members and an accounting system to be used in handling contributions and expenditures. It agreed to convene again in 1745, and this session, known as the British Conference of Methodist Societies, became an annual event. In 1746 Wesley read Lord King's Account of the Primitive Church and changed his mind about the uniqueness of the Church of England. He noted in his journal that he no longer believed that the Scripture prescribed only one form of church government.⁷ Thus he prepared the way for a later break with the Anglican Church which would create an independent Methodist church.

Wesley led in the development of Methodism by adjusting his goals and plan of action to fit changing circumstances rather than by setting up a framework and rigidly implementing it. Flexibility rather than advanced planning was the key to his success, for the Methodist organization met the needs of the people as those needs arose and became obvious. The Methodist system included itineracy, field preaching, the lay assistant, societies, and rules of membership. It stressed the value of time and method, the use of books and music, and the importance of gathering in new converts.

John Wesley lived until 1791 and devoted the last

⁷John Wesley, The Journal of the Reverend John Wesley, ed. by Nehemiah Curnock (8 vols.; London: Epworth Press, 1938), III, 243.

fifty years of his life to the Methodist movement. He was the undisputed leader of a revival which brought a negative reaction from the Church of England; yet, Wesley remained an Anglican priest until his death and never violated the canon laws of his Church. He did assume powers not granted a priest in 1784, when he began a series of ordinations to supply ministers for America, but this did not result in any punishment by the Church which no longer had ecclesiastical control over that area. His loyalty to the Church of England is repeatedly stated in his writings. In 1768 he answered an accuser: "We are in truth so far from being enemies to the Church, that we are rather bigots to it. . . . I advise all over whom I have any influence steadily to keep to the Church. Meantime I advise them to see that the kingdom of God is within them."⁸ In 1785, he wrote Charles Wesley, who was concerned about the first ordinations John had performed:

This does in no wise interfere with my remaining in the Church of England; from which I have no more desire to separate than I had fifty years ago. I still attend all the ordinances of the Church at all opportunities; and I constantly and earnestly desire all that are connected with me so to do.⁹

Wesley was concerned from the beginning of the revival with carrying it to foreign fields, yet he waited thirty

⁸John Wesley, The Letters of the Reverend John Wesley, A. M., ed. by John Telford (8 vols.; London: Epworth Press, 1931), V, 98.

⁹Ibid., VII, 284.

years after permanent societies were established in England to send missionaries over to the American colonies. The reasons for this delay were good ones. There was a scarcity of Methodist preachers for the circuits already existing in Great Britain. Furthermore, the men who did volunteer as lay helpers were generally from the lower-income group, and a trip to the distant colonies was expensive. Wesley's own unhappy experience on the frontier certainly made him hesitate to ask others to risk a similar assignment as long as there was a valid excuse for avoiding this. Finally, by the time the British Conference had missionaries to send, political tension made war seem inevitable.

Licensed Methodist preachers were sent to the colonies before the Revolution began. If they had not been, Methodism might have been confined within the Church of England as a reform movement. The British leaders of Methodism were usually Anglican priests who encouraged loyalty to that Church; the leaders of American Methodism were pioneers who had fewer ties to the Anglican Church. The successful struggle for political independence for the colonies made it easier for American Methodists to break away and establish an independent church. The early start in a new country helped Methodism grow into a major denomination.

Before Wesley and the British Conference took any action to send missionaries to America, small groups of Methodists had formed in Maryland and New York under colonists

who had been Wesleyan helpers in Great Britain. The people in these societies realized that they needed full-time, trained preachers to aid them, and they repeatedly requested that Wesley send such help. Twelve licensed laymen did come to America between 1769 and 1774, and the effectiveness of their tours was varied. Wesley considered a second trip himself, and in 1771 he wrote a friend: "If I live till Spring, and should have a clear, pressing call, I am as ready to embark for America as for Ireland. . . .Wherever the work of our Lord is to be carried on, that is my place for to-day."¹⁰ He never saw the necessity of a second trip to America, however, and in September, 1784, he wrote: "Nay, I shall pay no more visits to new worlds, till I go to the world of spirits."¹¹

Despite distance and poor communications Wesley exercised firm control over American Methodism. He insisted on recommending and licensing all the preachers personally, counseled them in long letters, and urged them to write full accounts of their work.

Send me the plain state of the case that I may know what to say. . . .I complain of you all for writing too seldom. Surely it would not hurt you were you to write once a month. O beware of every degree of sloth or indolence! Be good soldiers of Jesus Christ and send a circumstantial account of all your proceedings.¹²

¹⁰Ibid., V, 212.

¹¹Wesley, Journal, VII, 23.

¹²Wesley, Letters, V, 232.

By 1784 the outcome of the Revolution and Wesley's advanced years made some changes necessary in the Methodist system of America and Great Britain; however, all Methodists continued to respect and consult Wesley until his death.

The Great Awakening

While Methodism was developing in England, a movement started in the New England and Middle Colonies to bring religion to the untouched masses. This would come to be called the Great Awakening, a non-denominational, inter-colonial effort to place Christianity at the center of life. While John Wesley was occupied with problems and decisions in London and Bristol, George Whitefield, remaining in America for long periods, became the common denominator of scattered revivals and prepared the way for the Wesleyan missionaries. When British Methodism was officially begun in 1744, the Great Awakening was at its peak. It began in the 1720's when changes were made in the Dutch Reformed Church and continued until the 1770's when political rather than religious activity came to dominate the country.

Theodore J. Frelinghuysen, often credited as the originator of the Great Awakening, began his work in New Jersey in 1726. His methods foreshadowed those of the early Methodists. He stressed conversion and the piety which would result, and he believed in private prayer meetings and the use of lay helpers. The cleavage he caused in the American Dutch Reformed Church which had been closely tied to its European parent by language and tradition was the beginning of the first phase of the

Awakening. Some Presbyterians in New Jersey, led by Gilbert Tennent, adopted this new evangelical form of religion also, and they separated from their conservative brothers around 1738. A second phase of the Awakening had begun in New England and was led by Jonathan Edwards. John Wesley read that preacher's Narrative of Surprising Conversions, published in 1734, while he was in America. The book contributed to his religious development, for Edwards' meetings were successful in New England while Wesley's attempts failed in Georgia.

On October 30, 1739, George Whitefield landed in Delaware on his second American trip. He was ready to spread the message of evangelical religion by methods tested in Great Britain, and the country proved to be ready for his emotional approach. Although Whitefield's early years were spent in a tavern run by his mother, portions of his life are similar to that of Wesley's. He also was descended from a line of clergymen, attended Oxford, and joined the Holy Club in its third year of existence. In 1735, however, Whitefield had a vivid conversion experience which he spoke about at every opportunity. That same year he replaced the Wesleys, neither of whom had been converted before their departure for Georgia, as leader of the Methodists at Oxford. His ordination as a deacon took place on June 20, 1736, at the extremely young age of twenty-one, and he became an

Anglican priest three years later. In 1738, Whitefield made his first voyage to America just as a disillusioned John Wesley returned home, but his reaction was quite different. Although his stay was brief, he was captivated by the country and its potential. Returning to London to solicit funds for an orphanage, he found himself being attacked as an itinerant, a critic of the Church, and an advocate of emotional religion. He decided to move on to Bristol, a second possible source of money, but the situation there was the same. He did succeed in starting a successful outdoor ministry which John Wesley would continue.

Whitefield and Wesley did not always agree on the best methods for advancing religion or on points of theology. Whitefield, who never joined the organized Methodist movement, felt his mission to be that of an evangelist. He preached as often as possible, but he did not organize his followers. Wesley, on the other hand, felt that preaching was a major task, but he insisted on creating societies to continue the work that preaching began. In 1741 the two argued publicly over the doctrines of John Calvin, and this threatened to divide the ranks of Methodism. Wesley insisted on free salvation for all men as the guiding principle of the Methodist movement, and most of those who accepted the doctrine of the elect dropped out of the Wesleyan societies. This rift was later mended, but neither priest yielded on the issue; they simply agreed to disagree, while they pushed

forward together to spread vital religion.

Whitefield made seven trips to America between 1738 and 1770, and during each visit he covered as much territory as possible. His major intentions were to stir up religious emotions and to convert as many people as possible. He worked to increase the number of Christians, however, not the ranks of Anglicans, Methodists or Congregationalists. The evangelist made his first tour of North Carolina and other southern colonies in 1740, but the people there did not receive him as enthusiastically as had those in New England and Maryland. These southerners had not yet experienced the excitement of the Great Awakening. Soon after this trip the Presbyterians in New Jersey adopted an itinerant system and sent William Robinson to western Virginia and North Carolina, thus extending the revival. In the next decade the Baptists led by Shubal Stearns also moved into North Carolina, and they held emotional meetings which appealed to many of the people. Then, in January, 1755, Whitefield returned to the area, and the Carolina settlers welcomed him eagerly.

George Whitefield continued to serve as an itinerant in Great Britain and America until his death on September 30, 1770, in Newburyport, Massachusetts. On his last visit he met with Joseph Filmoor and Richard Boardman, the first two Wesleyan missionaries to America; he blessed their efforts

and, as a priest of the Church of England, he emphasized the importance of keeping Methodism within the framework of that institution.

Shortly after Whitefield's death, another phase of the Great Awakening began under the ministries of an Anglican, Devereux Jarratt, and two Methodists, Robert Strawbridge and George Shadford. "The year 1776 marked the first great Methodist revival in Virginia and it definitely placed that group to the fore as the continuators of the Great Awakening."¹³ This excitement which spread into North Carolina will be considered in detail later.

During the first quarter of the eighteenth century most of the American colonies were in a religious vacuum. The existing churches lacked zeal and were troubled by the short supply of ministers. Many of these churches tended to appeal to certain economic classes, geographic areas, or immigrant groups and to restrict their membership accordingly. The Great Awakening was a response to this situation. It was characterized by individualism, emotionalism, a stress on conduct over belief, an insistence on conversion, and placement of final authority in the Bible. The results of the Great Awakening are significant. It created opposition to the union of church and state, it made religion more democratic by appealing to all classes and by encouraging

¹³Gewehr, The Great Awakening, p. 137.

self-respect, and it brought forth native leaders and increased the feeling of inter-colonialism. Finally, from it developed an evangelism that suited the American frontier. This vigorous form of preaching strengthened the influence of Christianity on society, and it naturally suited the Methodists.¹⁴

¹⁴Works consulted for this section on the Great Awakening include: Joseph Belcher, George Whitefield: A Biography with Special Reference to his Labors in America (New York: American Tract Society, 1857); Charles H. Maxson, The Great Awakening in the Middle Colonies (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1920); William Warren Sweet, Makers of Christianity (New York: Henry Holt & Co., 1937); and Joseph Tracy, The Great Awakening (Boston: Tappan & Dennet, 1842).

The Origin of Methodism in America

The Wesleyan movement in America began and grew for almost a decade independent of any action by the British Conference of Methodist Societies. As the need for religious meetings became obvious, small groups of four or more neighbors were organized by laymen who had been active in English societies. The primary concern of these units was to provide worship and fellowship experiences; the conversion of colonists not familiar with Methodism was not usually attempted.

Two places claim the honor of being the site of the first Methodist society in America, New York City and Frederick County, Maryland. Most historians of the movement conclude that the two societies started at approximately the same time.¹⁵

In the early 1760's Phillip Embury, who lived in New York City and was a member of Trinity Lutheran Church, began to preach to his family and friends. A cousin had encouraged this after witnessing a card game with betting,

¹⁵In 1916 the Methodist Episcopal Church appointed an official commission to investigate the place of origin of American Methodism. New York City was selected as the site, but the report did not take all the evidence into consideration, and it was discarded. The necessary historical evidence to establish either society as the first is not available. This is the conclusion of William Warren Sweet in Methodism in American History (New York: Abingdon Press, 1933), pp. 50-51.

because she felt that they had all grown careless about the place of religion in their daily lives. Embury had been converted to Methodism by John Wesley in 1752 in Ireland, had served as a local preacher there, and had immigrated to America in 1760. By 1766 he had organized a society with five members, and in 1768 the group dedicated Wesley Chapel as their first meeting house. The next year Embury, seeking better work as a carpenter, moved to Washington County, New York, and formed a second society there.

The first New York society was greatly strengthened in 1767 when Thomas Webb, a man with money and influence, visited Embury and offered his services. Webb was a captain in the British army stationed in the colonies, but he was also a licensed Methodist lay preacher. A Moravian converted him in 1765, but he later joined the Wesleyans. His preaching attracted many who would never have listened to a simple carpenter like Embury. After some months in New York, Webb traveled into Pennsylvania, Delaware and New Jersey to plant Methodism and to establish a preaching circuit. The society started in Philadelphia in 1768 was a direct result of this tour. His repeated requests to Wesley for qualified British preachers had much to do with their coming. This was perhaps his most important contribution. When the Revolutionary War began, Webb returned to England rather than remain and fight against his many friends. His role in the development of American Methodism

should not be minimized, as it often is, and William Warren Sweet concludes that he deserves more credit than any other early leader.¹⁶

In November, 1769, shortly after the first British missionaries had sailed for America, John Wesley wrote a letter about the Methodist system to a professor in Sweden. Concerning the colonies he said: "There are only three Methodist Societies in America: one at Philadelphia, one at New York, and one twelve miles from it. There are five preachers there; two have been at New York for some years. Three are lately gone over."¹⁷ Since he was rarely inaccurate about the movement that he led, Wesley must not have considered the society in Maryland a Methodist one. Its founder was Robert Strawbridge, who had been converted by John Wesley and had served as a local preacher under him in County Leitrim, Ireland. He had emigrated to Frederick County, Maryland, for economic reasons, but once in America he seems always to have considered religion his first duty. Between 1762 and 1766 he organized a society in his home. Its rapid growth led him to build one of the first log meeting houses in the country. Unordained, as were all the Methodist preachers in America until 1784, he traveled through Maryland, Delaware, Pennsylvania and

¹⁶Sweet, Methodism in American History, p. 57. By early Sweet means the period from 1760 through 1768.

¹⁷Wesley, Letters, V, 156.

Virginia forming classes. Strawbridge was never officially recognized by John Wesley as a Methodist preacher, and he did not abide by the discipline and rules adopted by the Methodist societies in America. His boldest deviation was the administration of the sacraments of baptism and communion which he performed since there was no one else to serve the people. This problem of being without the ordinances of the Church concerned all the Methodists for years, but he was the first to resolve it by taking on such authority. Despite Wesley's attitude, Strawbridge always considered himself a Wesleyan, and his acceptance of frontier reality helped pave the way for an independent Methodist church. His conversion of native-born, local preachers such as William Watters, Jesse Lee and Freeborn Garrettson provided many early leaders of the Methodist church. Without doubt, his ministry covered a wider field than that of Embury and probably equaled that of Webb. These three men led the Methodist movement in the colonies through its first phase which was characterized by local initiative and control. Without any support from John Wesley, they planted Methodism in certain areas of America.

A second phase of development which dates from 1769 until 1775 was directed by the Wesleyan missionaries who succeeded in establishing a system for the scattered Methodist societies. To do this regular organizational meetings of as many Methodist leaders as possible were held.

During these sessions, similar to those of the British Conference, circuits were established and preachers were assigned; other preachers were sent out into areas where no societies existed. This planning and division of territory replaced the casual groups begun and led by concerned laymen.

In April, 1768, Thomas Taylor of New York wrote John Wesley requesting "an able and experienced preacher; one who has both gifts and grace for the work."¹⁸ This appeal was presented to the British Conference, and several reasons were given for the decision to postpone considering it for a year. Though this organization had 129,000 members in Great Britain, it was not strong. A shortage of lay preachers existed for the forty-six circuits already established.¹⁹ New York was far away, and transportation to and from England was dangerous and expensive. The political atmosphere was tense in 1768, and those at the conference thought that a year might resolve existing problems or bring on a state of war. None of these situations had changed to any degree when the twenty-sixth British Conference met in 1769, but a call for missionaries to New York was issued anyway. Two men volunteered, and a collection was taken up for their passage.

The two volunteers, Joseph Pilmoor and Richard Boardman, landed in Philadelphia on October 24, 1769. Their

¹⁸Duren, Trail, p. 53.

¹⁹Wesley, Journal, V, 282.

purpose, as recorded in Pilmoor's journal, was "to gather together in one the people of God that are scattered abroad and revive spiritual religion;"²⁰ however, they spent their first two years in cities where societies were well established. A third missionary Robert Williams had come early in 1769 with Wesley's consent but without Conference financial support. He worked under the direction of Boardman, who was Wesley's assistant in America, and he traveled in New York, Maryland and Virginia as people in the outlying areas began requesting preachers. In 1770 John King came to America on a business trip, saw the need for Wesleyan missionaries and stayed on as a volunteer. These four men preached with success and formed societies, but they were so occupied with these chores that they did not hold a conference of preachers and did not take time to work toward the formal organization of American Methodism. As a result of this lack of supervision, both local and traveling preachers tended to do as they pleased and to work in the same areas; therefore, much of the work that was done was repetitious.

The British Conference sent two more men in October, 1771. They were Richard Wright and Francis Asbury. Wright made little impression on American Methodism before his return to England in 1774, but Asbury, Wesley's newly appointed assistant, had the necessary talent for organization

²⁰Sweet, Methodism in American History, p. 63.

and administration which had been lacking. He is more widely known than any other early Methodist in America, and his life will be treated later. It was Asbury who insisted on "a circulation of preachers, to avoid partiality and popularity,"²¹ and this plan suited the frontier and widened the movement.

In 1773 Captain Webb went to England to make a special plea for additional men, and in June three returned with him, Joseph Yearby, Thomas Rankin and George Shadford. The next year three more arrived, James Dempster, William Glendenning and Martin Rodda, and they would have brought the total number of missionaries to twelve if Boardman, Pilmoor and Wright had not departed in January, 1774. This missionary phase of Methodist development ended in 1775 when Wesley wrote Rankin, his third American assistant, that he would send no more lay aides until the political troubles had ended. Only three of the twelve missionaries sent by Wesley would remain in America as Methodists until their deaths.²²

²¹Francis Asbury, The Journal and Letters of Francis Asbury, ed. by Elmer T. Clark, J. Manning Potts, and Jacob S. Payton (3 vols.; Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1958), I, 10.

²²This information was collected from several sources: Bucke, History of American Methodism, I, 80-81; Umphrey Lee and William Warren Sweet, A Short History of Methodism (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1956), p. 32; Asbury, Journal, I, 6; John P. Lockwood, The Western Pioneers or Memorials of the Lives and Labours of the Rev. Richard Boardman and the Rev. Joseph Pilmoor (London: Wesleyan Conference Office, 1881), pp. 32-40; and Abel Stevens, History of the Methodist

John Wesley could not have chosen a worse time for transporting Methodism to the colonies than the period he did, the years immediately preceding the Revolution. In 1763 the British Empire had ended its colonial policy of salutary neglect, and a series of measures were adopted to make the American settlements a source of profit. The Stamp Act of 1765, the Townshend Acts of 1767, and other actions had increased the anti-British feelings of the colonists, and they caused many Americans to be suspicious of Englishmen and English institutions. Furthermore, religious revivals had been in progress in the colonies since the 1720's and many areas were reacting to this by a greater interest in pleasure and politics than in religion. Yet, the Methodist movement grew steadily almost every year, as did other dissenting sects, and the reasons for its success are closely tied in with the message of Methodism.

In the first place, John Wesley and the preachers under his direction believed in Arminianism or universal salvation. To them God's nature was that of love, and His plan was one of salvation for all men who used their freedom of choice to meet certain conditions. This promise of heaven was important to men who lived hard daily lives and who hoped for a better future. Moreover, the Methodists joined other

Episcopal Church in the United States of America (4 vols.; New York: Carlton & Porter, 1865), I, 102-219. See Appendix B, p. 136.

non-Anglican groups in emphasizing the importance of a conversion experience. If a man would admit his sinful nature and express a hope for salvation, then the Holy Ghost would bring him into contact with God. This supplied an emotionalism in religion which was lacking in the Anglican Church and was successful with frontier people who had been without meaningful religious services for years. Finally, these untrained men were not concerned with doctrinal debates, and they stressed the simple teachings of their religion: faith in God and Jesus Christ, love of one's fellowman, and obedience to the teachings of the Bible.

The success of the movement depended on its spokesmen, men who often lacked education but not eloquence and endurance. These preachers ministered to the poor by identifying with them, by staying in their homes and by eating their food. Asbury's journal is filled with evidence of their living conditions. "We have ridden sixty miles along incredibly bad roads, and our fare was not excellent. O what pay would induce a man to go through wet and dry, and fatigue and suffering, as we do?--souls are our hire."²³ Furthermore, these preachers did not preach and pass on; rather, they set up classes for their converts to sustain fellowship and to encourage spiritual growth.

²³Asbury, Journal and Letters, I, 429.

It is important to remember that this movement operated within the Anglican Church. Its spokesmen continually expressed their loyalty to that institution, although the Church did not approve of their activities. In 1769, Joseph Pilmoor recorded in his journal that "the Methodist societies was [sic] never designed to make a separation from the Church of England or be looked upon as a church."²⁴ Even Francis Asbury who early realized the potential of the colonies for independent status held this opinion until December, 1784. Since he was the most influential individual in American Methodism, a brief examination of his life and thought helps explain this binding allegiance.

Born in 1745 near Birmingham, England, Asbury was brought up in a poor but religious home. His mother had lost a daughter before his birth and turned to the Church of England and the Bible for comfort. During her second pregnancy she had a vision which revealed that her child was a male who would be a religious leader to the heathens. Therefore, as Francis grew up, mother and son spent two hours daily reading scripture, praying and singing, in an attempt to make that vision a reality. Asbury's formal education was limited; he entered school at six and withdrew at eleven because of a harsh teacher. For the next few years he was apprenticed, and his master happened to be a

²⁴Sweet, Methodism in American History, p. 63.

Methodist who took him to a number of society meetings. In a biographical sketch included in his journal the future bishop wrote that he was properly awakened between the ages of thirteen and fourteen.²⁵ At sixteen he was reading and praying in public, at eighteen he was exhorting as a local preacher, and at twenty-two, with five years experience, he joined the Methodist Conference. His decision to go as a missionary to America was made in 1771, and he wrote: "I am going to live to God, and to bring others so to do. . . .If God does not acknowledge me in America, I will soon return to England."²⁶

Asbury's early preaching trips were in New York, Maryland and Pennsylvania, and their success was noted by Wesley. His major difficulty was opposition by Anglican ministers who objected to this invasion of their parishes. In one recorded scene a Mr. Read charged him with preaching without a license, with making a schism, and with giving aid where none was needed. Asbury replied that his authority was from God to preach until there "were no swearers or other sinners."²⁷ It always bothered him that those whom he came to help were his bitterest opponents.

In 1775 Asbury served briefly in Norfolk, Virginia,

²⁵Asbury, Journal and Letters, I, 123-25.

²⁶Ibid., I, 4-5.

²⁷Ibid., p. 58.

but found little encouragement for the movement there. Without authority, he moved to the Brunswick Circuit to share in its revival. In that same year several missionaries decided to return to England because of the political situation, but Asbury chose to remain:

I can by no means agree to leave such a field for gathering souls to Christ, as we have in America. It would be an eternal dishonour to the Methodists, that we should all leave three thousand souls, who desire to commit themselves to our care; neither is it the part of a good shepherd to leave his flock in time of danger; therefore, I am determined, by the grace of God, not to leave them, let the consequences be what it may.²⁸

His safety was uncertain for the next few years. He was arrested briefly in 1776 in Maryland for preaching without a state license which he could have obtained by swearing his allegiance to the American revolutionary effort. On March 10, 1778, Asbury finally went into seclusion at Judge Thomas White's in Delaware, for in that colony clergymen were not required to take a loyalty oath. His journal entry for March 13, 1778, reads:

I was under some heaviness of mind. But it was no wonder: three thousand miles from home--my friends have left me--I am considered by some as an enemy of the country--every day liable to be seized by violence and abused. However, all this is but a trifle to suffer for Christ and the salvation of souls. Lord, stand by me!²⁹

Although he preached in the surrounding area, Asbury did not

²⁸Ibid., p. 161.

²⁹Ibid., pp. 263-64.

really re-enter the traveling ministry until April, 1780. Then, he toured the South, attempting to heal the schism of northern and southern Methodists which occurred in 1779 and to reunite the Anglicans and Methodists.

He spent the remaining years of his life on the circuits and estimated that he traveled five thousand miles a year for a third of a century.³⁰ Asbury had been loyal to the Church of England as long as it was feasible for an American to retain this bond. He accepting the severing of this connection, however, and his career is tied closely to the establishment of an independent Methodist church. He was ordained a deacon, an elder, and a superintendent or bishop in that church on December 25-27, 1784, after the political ties between Great Britain and America were cut.

Francis Asbury was not a popular leader. He condemned humor as frivolity, and he spoke sternly, almost as a dictator, on matters of proper conduct and faith. He maintained a tiring daily schedule of reading, preaching, praying and lecturing, and he expected his brothers to do likewise; yet, this apparently strong man was constantly sick owing to constant mental and physical pressures. His journal refers to boils, fevers, rheumatism, weak eyes, asthma, ulcers, skin diseases and toothaches. Despite his unpleasant traits, he was unanimously chosen to lead American Methodism, and his dedication to the movement was largely responsible

³⁰Duren, Trail, p. 85.

for its rapid success. His greatest contribution was the itinerant system which assigned one or two men to travel each established circuit for six months. At the end of that period Asbury felt that each man should be restationed. He also insisted that the American Conference should have authority greater than that of any individual and should make its decisions in a democratic manner.³¹ This created a body quite different from the British Conference which really only ratified Wesley's decisions. Finally, Asbury refused to be involved in doctrinal disputes, feeling that Methodism was too weak for such luxury and that God's mission could best be carried out in a spirit of unity. His shaping of the Methodist movement in colonial America was a third phase of its development concluding what had been begun by laymen like Robert Strawbridge and furthered by the Wesleyan missionaries.

As Methodism developed in America, its first centers were in the northern colonies, but as the movement was carried to the South it seemed to have greater success. By 1775 there were approximately 3,148 society members; 2,384 were located below the Mason-Dixon line and 764 above it. In 1780 the total number was 8,540 and 7,808 were in the South.³² Many who study this period conclude that the

³¹Asbury, Journal and Letters, I, 471-72.

³²Sweet, Methodism in American History, pp. 65-66.

Church of England, established in several southern colonies, nurtured Methodism; this protection made the movement socially acceptable while giving it meeting places and some trained advisors. Others think that Methodist conversions were fewer in New England and the northeastern colonies because of the strength of the congregational churches and other dissenting sects in those areas. In many places in the South there were no churches at all to compete with the Methodists. Since most of the fighting took place in the North, these war-time disruptions retarded religious movements in that area during the late 1770's. Moreover, many southern colonists were dissatisfied with the Established Church; they found the clergy unsatisfactory and in many cases unsuitable. The combination of all these factors provides an adequate explanation for the great success of southern Methodism. The insecure position of the Church of England as an advantage for the Methodists is particularly applicable to North Carolina.

Religion in North Carolina Before the Methodists

The settling of northeastern North Carolina by Virginia colonists began in the 1650's. Most of those men and women who located in the Albemarle region had been reared as Anglicans, but the absence of ministers in that area caused them to omit the Church as a major force in their lives. Gradually, settlers spread out to occupy the eastern third of North Carolina, and small settlements were established along the Neuse and Pamlico Rivers. During the 1720's and 1730's the area along the Lower Cape Fear was settled also. Then, in the 1750's, groups moved into the Piedmont. This section of the colony attracted primarily Germans and Ulster Scots, and the denominations mainly represented there were the Lutheran, German Reformed, Moravian, and Presbyterian. During the colony's first hundred years no single religious group gained a dominant position, although the Quakers had controlled the government at an earlier period.

The religious situation in North Carolina did not indicate the intentions of the English planners and promoters of colonization. The Church of England was supposed to be planted in every settlement of Englishmen, but rarely was this done during the first phase of development. Three charters to the province of Carolina were granted in the

seventeenth century: one by Charles I in 1629 to Sir Robert Heath who never used it; and two by Charles II in 1663 and 1665 to a company of eight men. In all three the Church of England alone was to have official encouragement though religious toleration would be allowed so long as the civil peace was not disturbed. To implement the charters' religious provisions, the elected colonial assembly was to supply land for the Anglican ministers and to pay them, while dissenting sects had to support their preachers through private funds.

A governor for Albemarle County was appointed in October, 1664, and this marks the beginning of government in the Carolina area. William Drummond and those to follow him were chosen and supervised by the Proprietors, but they were paid by the colonial assembly. The instructions they received urged them to establish a tax-supported church as part of the civil government.³³ Yet, almost fifty years after Drummond's appointment, the colony was still without organized religion, and the following information was sent to the S. P. G.: "In North Carolina, above five thousand souls without any minister, or any religious administration used; no public worship celebrated, neither the children baptized, nor the dead buried in any Christian form."³⁴

³³The Proprietors' instruction to Governor Samuel Stephens in 1667 is typical. Saunders, ed., Colonial Records, I, 167.

³⁴William Warren Sweet, Religion in Colonial America (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1942), p. 54.

There were reasons for this: a scattered population, poor transportation, the disinterest of the Proprietors in the area, and the unpopularity of a state church typical among lower-class settlers. Furthermore, the Church of England had been hesitant to send men to the wilderness, and Daniel Brett, its first missionary to Carolina, did not arrive until 1700. By this time the dissenters had made gains they fought to keep; the best example of this is the Act of 1669 which made marriage a civil contract rather than a religious ceremony, since "there is noe [sic] minister as yet in this County."³⁵

In 1701 the colonial assembly passed its first Vestry Act; this law laid out parishes, organized vestries, provided a poll tax to support the clergy, and gave financial control of the Church to the vestry rather than the governor. The Lord Proprietors rejected this legislative attempt to put their charters' religious provisions in effect, because the salaries for ministers were inadequate and the vestry had too much power. Before the refusal took place, however, St. Paul's Parish (Chowan) held an election for its vestry and built a church at Edenton which was completed in October, 1702. This was the first church structure in the colony. The dissenters in Carolina, chiefly Quakers at the time, objected strongly to taxation

³⁵ Saunders, ed., Colonial Records, I, 184.

for church support, and, in an attempt to silence this continuing opposition, the Assembly of 1703 passed a second Vestry Act requiring its members to take an oath as loyal subjects of Queen Anne and as communicants of the Church of England. The Queen herself disallowed this legislation, because it was a violation of the 1665 charter, but enforcement was attempted and a decade of tension and great confusion followed.³⁶

The Vestry Act of 1715 provided for a system of nine parishes, an elected vestry of twelve men in each parish, and a limited tax for church support; it required that an oath be taken by each vestryman against rebellion and to the Church of England. The law restated that the Anglican Church alone could have public encouragement, and it placed the minister on the vestry as a check to that body. As a conciliatory gesture, it did reaffirm the act of

³⁶The Quakers had not disturbed the civil peace; therefore, they were guaranteed religious toleration. Governor Thomas Cary fined all who did enter office without taking the oath, and the Quakers, to combat this and the law, sent a representative to protest to the Proprietors. In 1707 the Proprietors ordered a suspension of the law and the removal of Cary from office. Acting governor William Glover who also enforced the law was opposed by the Quakers and Cary, and fighting seemed inevitable. An election was held to decide between Cary and Glover, and Cary was reinstated. The law requiring an oath was declared void. Then, in 1710, the Proprietors appointed Edward Hyde as governor, and the legislature that met under his direction attempted unsuccessfully to establish the Church again. Cary attacked the Governor's forces in an attempt to regain control, but he was defeated; thus, the so-called "Cary Rebellion" ended.

marriage as a civil ceremony.³⁷ An accompanying act provided legal protection for dissenters. Although it was submitted to the Proprietors for confirmation, there is no record of its approval or rejection. The act was put into effect in St. Paul's Parish (Edenton) and at Bath where a church was constructed in 1734, and its provisions were unchanged until 1741.

Proprietary government in Carolina had been nominal, especially in the northern section, for the Lords Proprietors had done little to derive a profit and seemed uninterested in further development. When the Crown showed a strong interest in regaining the land, an agreement was reached, and in 1729 Carolina became a royal colony. Royal authorities were concerned with religion as well as the economy, and the instructions to royal governors repeatedly called for the firm establishment of the Church of England.³⁸

In 1741 the assembly passed another Vestry Act and sent it to London for approval. This legislation called for marriage by the clergy rather than by civil authorities, thus nullifying the Acts of 1669 and 1715. This was a surprising concession on the part of many assemblymen who were dissenters. Nevertheless, the act was not satisfactory to imperial authorities, because it gave vestries the sole

³⁷Saunders, ed., Colonial Records, II, 207-13.

³⁸Ibid., III, 110. This is typical of such instructions.

right of presentation or selecting rectors; in Great Britain this was considered the right of the king or his representative. In 1754 the Privy Council officially disallowed the act, and Governor Arthur Dobbs pressed for the passage of a suitable one. Instead, the assembly passed a very similar act which was disallowed for the same reason. For the next decade there was a triangular fight over the right to appoint a clergyman to a parish (presentation) and other church matters: the dissenters in the colony wanted no establishment; supporters of the king wanted a vestry with token powers; and democratic churchmen wanted an establishment guided by elected local laymen. As a result, no satisfactory act could be agreed on by all sides.

Finally, the Vestry Act of 1765, passed by the assembly and confirmed by the Privy Council, established the Church of England in North Carolina. This was possible only because no reference to the method of selecting clergy was contained in the law. Governor William Tryon did assign seven men to stations in 1766, but a majority of the colony's thirty-two parishes remained vacant. The Anglican Church was never really effectively established in North Carolina. Any success the Anglicans did have should be credited to the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts which provided thirty-three of the forty-six clergymen who came to North Carolina during the colonial period. This organization, chartered by the Crown in 1701,

considered the furthering of religion among Englishmen in the colonies and the conversion of the natives as its main objectives. It sent John Blair as its first missionary to North Carolina in 1704, just as it sent John Wesley to Georgia in 1735.³⁹

Why was the Church of England such a failure in the colony? A major reason was its unpopularity among the kind of men who settled North Carolina. The Germans, Ulster Scots and Highland Scots were committed to their previous beliefs. The uneducated, lower-class farmers who were in a majority had little in common with a church of special privilege and royal connection. They objected to supporting it with their taxes and found its lack of emotionalism unappealing. These men were often converted by the dissenting sects, and this satisfactory religious experience gave them another cause for opposition. The political struggle over the various vestry acts postponed establishment until 1765, a time when all British institutions were held in suspicion and when clergymen were leaving for England rather than arriving.

Administrative problems also hindered the Church. There was no bishop in any colony; therefore, to be ordained men had to return to England, an expensive and dangerous

³⁹David D. Oliver, "The Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in the Province of North Carolina," James Sprunt Historical Publications, IX (1910), 10.

trip. The absence of a bishop made the disciplining of the clergy difficult, for disagreements were hard to settle by letters which were often delayed. The Bishop of London did send three commissaries to North Carolina at different times, but none did much to strengthen the Church's position. Because ordination was a difficult matter there were never enough clergymen in the colony; therefore, people had to do without the sacraments that they so desperately wanted. Furthermore, churches were few, members were scattered, and transportation was difficult.

Finally, the caliber of the clergy who did serve in North Carolina left much to be desired. Governor Tryon admitted this when he requested that the S. P. G. discontinue sending unqualified representatives and supply "a sufficient number of clergy as exemplary in their lives, as orthodox in their doctrine."⁴⁰ In a study of the Church of England in North and South Carolina done by the Episcopal Dioceses of those states further evidence is given:

Urmstone [Anglican missionary for the colony from 1711 until 1721] is the most disgraceful character in the history of the Church in America. He was scurrillous, profane, intemperate, and mendacious. He did more harm to the cause of the Church in North Carolina than any man who has ever figured in our history, and it is utterly incredible that he should have been allowed for ten years to blast the prospects of the Church in the Province

⁴⁰Saunders, ed., Colonial Records, VII, 102.

by his presence. Yet so it was.⁴¹

This problem of personnel was not recognized by the Church in time, and it contributed greatly to the settlers' dissatisfaction, making them eager for honest, concerned preachers of the gospel.

The dissenters were quick to take advantage of the Church's absence and then its weakness. The first Quaker itinerants appeared in 1672, and the first yearly meeting of the Quakers was established in 1698. The Quakers were quite significant in the early governments of the colony and fought against the establishment of the Church. The Baptists organized their first congregation in Chowan County in 1727, and the Separate Baptists settled in Guilford County in 1755. Both groups were strong opponents of a tax-supported church, and they gained many converts by preaching universal salvation. In the 1740's Presbyterian itinerants were sent into the colony, and the first regular Presbyterian pastor was stationed in North Carolina by 1757.

Even the Methodists had a sympathetic spokesman in George Whitefield, who preached in the colony for the first time in 1739 at New Bern. Back in North Carolina in 1747 he recorded in his journal: "I am here hunting in the woods, these ungospelized wilds, for sinners. It is pleasant work,

⁴¹Joseph Blount Cheshire, Jr., ed., Sketches of Church History in North Carolina (Wilmington, N. C.: William L. DeRosset, Jr., 1892), p. 62.

though my body is weak and crazy."⁴² Whitefield was not interested in denominational conversions, however, and he did not establish Methodism in the colony. During the early 1760's James Reed, an Anglican clergyman at New Bern, wrote repeatedly about the troublesome dissenters there. In one letter he described them as Methodists who were "ignorant, censorious, and uncharitable."⁴³ In 1761 he complained that "the Methodists of late have given me a great deal of trouble. . . .By preaching up the inexpediency of Human Learning and the practice of moral virtue and the great expediency of Dreams Visions and immediate Revelation."⁴⁴ In that same year, however, he concluded that the fever of Methodism had abated, when it is doubtful that the people he described as Methodists were ever followers of the Wesleyan tradition.⁴⁵ In 1764 George Whitefield explained that the so-called Methodists of North Carolina were improperly named; he felt that the fever of the movement had really not yet risen there and wrote: "At New Bern, last Sunday, a good impression were [sic] made. The desire

⁴²Belcher, George Whitefield, p. 289.

⁴³Saunders, ed., Colonial Records, XI, 265.

⁴⁴Ibid., p. 565.

⁴⁵The first known groups of Methodists date back to this time, but records place them only in New York and Maryland. Furthermore, the first Methodist missionary did not travel in North Carolina until 1772.

though my body is weak and crazy."⁴² Whitefield was not interested in denominational conversions, however, and he did not establish Methodism in the colony. During the early 1760's James Reed, an Anglican clergyman at New Bern, wrote repeatedly about the troublesome dissenters there. In one letter he described them as Methodists who were "ignorant, censorious, and uncharitable."⁴³ In 1761 he complained that "the Methodists of late have given me a great deal of trouble. . . .By preaching up the inexpediency of Human Learning and the practice of moral virtue and the great expediency of Dreams Visions and immediate Revelation."⁴⁴ In that same year, however, he concluded that the fever of Methodism had abated, when it is doubtful that the people he described as Methodists were ever followers of the Wesleyan tradition.⁴⁵ In 1764 George Whitefield explained that the so-called Methodists of North Carolina were improperly named; he felt that the fever of the movement had really not yet risen there and wrote: "At New Bern, last Sunday, a good impression were [sic] made. The desire

⁴²Belcher, George Whitefield, p. 289.

⁴³Saunders, ed., Colonial Records, XI, 265.

⁴⁴Ibid., p. 565.

⁴⁵The first known groups of Methodists date back to this time, but records place them only in New York and Maryland. Furthermore, the first Methodist missionary did not travel in North Carolina until 1772.

of the people in this section to hear the Gospel makes me almost determined to come back in the Spring."⁴⁶ Many colonists were ready for the Methodist missionaries to come, and their readiness gives more support to the theory of success where the people were dissatisfied with their religious life than to the theory held by Francis Asbury and others that the Anglican Church protected and encouraged the Methodist movement.⁴⁷

⁴⁶J. K. Rouse, Some Interesting Colonial Churches in North Carolina (Kannapolis, N. C.: n. p., 1961), p. 16.

⁴⁷For Asbury's opinion see his Journal and Letters, I, 470-71.

The Progress of Methodism in the Colony and
State of North Carolina

A. Joseph Pilmoor Introduces Methodism in 1772

In the autumn of 1772 while on a missionary tour of the South, Joseph Pilmoor entered North Carolina. He had been in America since 1769, but his previous traveling had been limited to the New York-Philadelphia area. Then, in 1771, Francis Asbury arrived and spoke out against this lack of outreach. Criticism by a fellow priest was unfamiliar to Pilmoor, a protégé of John Wesley. His career to that point had been quite satisfactory. He had been converted by Wesley at the age of sixteen, educated at Kingswood School which was operated by the Methodists, accepted as an itinerant at the age of twenty-six, and sent as one of the first Wesleyan missionaries to the colonies. Furthermore, his letters to Wesley from America indicate that he considered his work there successful. In November, 1769, he wrote: "Blessed be God for field-preaching! There seems to be a great and effectual door opening in this country, and I hope many souls will be gathered in."⁴⁸ One year later he urged the sending of more missionaries and concluded:

⁴⁸Matthew H. Moore, Sketches of the Pioneers of Methodism in North Carolina and Virginia (Nashville: Southern Methodist Publishing House, 1884), p. 42.

Our coming to America has not been in vain. The Lord has been pleased to bless our feeble attempts to advance his kingdom in the world. Many have believed the report, and unto some the arm of the Lord has been revealed. There begins to be a shaking among the dry bones and they come together that God may breathe upon them.⁴⁹

Asbury did not share in this sense of satisfaction, for he felt that the country must be covered by circuit riders before the missionaries could rest; therefore, he continually pressed for more tours by the men who were available. On April 22, 1772, he recorded in his journal:

This night Brother Williams came in from Virginia. He gives a flaming account of the work there. Many of the people seem to be ripe for the Gospel, and ready to receive us. I humbly hope, before long, about seven preachers of us will spread seven or eight hundred miles, and preach in as many places as we are able to attend. Lord, make us humble, watchful, and useful to the end of our lives!⁵⁰

The two men disagreed publicly about the best means of establishing Methodism in the colonies, but after a year of tension Pilmoor did agree "to go forth in the name of the Lord, and preach the gospel in the waste places of the wilderness and seek after those who have no shepherd."⁵¹ He left New York in May and preached in Pennsylvania, Maryland and Virginia. Although he felt it was not worthwhile to organize groups outside well-populated areas, he did

⁴⁹Ibid., pp. 42-43.

⁵⁰Asbury, Journal and Letters, I, 28.

⁵¹Bucke, History of American Methodism, I, 86.

establish societies in centers like Baltimore and Norfolk. Four months after starting out, he entered North Carolina, and on September 28, 1772, preached the first sermon by a Methodist in the colony at Currituck Court House. That night he made this entry in his journal: "God made his word like a hammer that breaketh the rock in pieces. The poor people expressed utmost gratitude."⁵² Following a brief tour of South Carolina, Pilmoor spent much of December in eastern North Carolina, and he preached in the Anglican churches at Edenton and Bath. On Christmas Day he attended Anglican services at New Bern and was much pleased with the people and their response to him. What he found displeasing was the colony's religious situation: "two hundred miles wide and is settled near four hundred miles in length from the sea and the Church established as in England; yet in all this Country there are but eleven ministers."⁵³ Traveling in North Carolina was unsatisfactory also, and he wrote of excessive rains, poor roads, and scarce food. Pilmoor's journal entries usually ended with words of prayer and dedication.

Pilmoor introduced Methodism in North Carolina in 1772, and he toured eastern portions of the province in the first half of 1773. He did not establish a single society,

⁵²William L. Grissom, History of Methodism in North Carolina from 1772-1805 (Nashville: Publishing House of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South, 1905), pp. 34-35.

⁵³Bucke, History of American Methodism, I, 88.

however, because his time was brief and there were no trained laymen to maintain them. In July, 1773, he returned to Philadelphia to attend the first annual conference of Methodists held in this country, and in January, 1774, he returned to England to escape a war which he felt was inevitable. Pilmoor remained with the Methodists as a local preacher until 1784, but during the following year he became an Episcopal clergyman and returned to Philadelphia. He remained friendly to the Wesleyans until his death in 1825.

While Pilmoor was in New Bern during Christmas, 1772, other Methodist laymen and preachers in the Maryland area decided to meet in order to discuss their progress and future plans. Their two-day session was such a help to those who participated that they decided to convene regularly. Thus began the quarterly conference, so-called because it met each three months of the year. As it developed, the quarterly conference became the governing body of a circuit. It had four major functions: (1) to hear a report from each preacher on the work he had completed; (2) to manage the property and finances of the societies of that area; (3) to recommend any from its congregations who desired a license to preach; and (4) to direct the programs of the local societies through commissions of evangelism, missions,

education and finance.⁵⁴ The only problem recorded in the minutes of this first meeting was a dispute over the administration of the sacraments of baptism and communion by laymen. Robert Strawbridge was in favor of this, but Francis Asbury, who presided, was opposed and represented the majority view. All of those present except Strawbridge agreed to abide by a rule of the British Conference that unordained preachers would not administer the sacraments. This was a temporary solution to a continuing problem.

B. The Roles of Robert Williams and Devereux Jarratt
in the Virginia Revival of 1773

North Carolina Methodism was closely tied in with the movement in Virginia from 1773 until 1776; in fact, its growth was really another phase of the Virginia revival which was begun and maintained by a few dedicated men. Robert Williams was one of them. He was born and converted to Methodism in England and served as a local preacher in Ireland. In the fall of 1769 Williams came to America without appointment by Wesley or money from the Conference; however, he had Wesley's consent to serve under Boardman and did preach in the northern colonies. His work was successful, and in 1770 his name was placed on the appointment

⁵⁴Nolan B. Harmon, The Organization of the Methodist Church (Nashville: Methodist Publishing House, 1953), pp. 110-14.

In 1952 it was decided by the Methodist Church that each local church should have its own quarterly conference. The functions of this conference remain basically the same.

list for America by the British Conference. Williams was the first person to publish and sell Wesleyan literature in this country, and it is unfortunate that the first American Conference held in 1773 made this illegal without Wesley's permission for each publication. The American preachers feared that profits made would be used for personal gain, but their distrust delayed distribution of much that would have been useful to the colonists.

In 1772 Williams began working in Norfolk, and the people who first heard him thought him insane.⁵⁵ He professed loyalty to and attended the Anglican Church. Yet, he would go outside after a service and begin a fervent sermon of his own; then, he would allow a period of time for personal testimony and advice. These actions indicated some dissatisfaction with the program of the Church of England. A convert described him:

He was a plain, artless, indefatigable preacher of the gospel, and often proved the goodness of his doctrine by his tears in public, and by his life and conduct in private. His manner of preaching was well calculated to awaken careless sinners, and to encourage penitent mourners. He spared no pains in order to do good.⁵⁶

Early in 1773 Williams was stationed at Petersburg but had little success there; he toured an adjoining county and almost accidentally began a revival that would continue for

⁵⁵John Atkinson, The Beginnings of the Wesleyan Movement in America and the Establishment Therein of Methodism (New York: Hunt & Eaton, 1896), p. 103.

⁵⁶Moore, Sketches, p. 50.

years and would spread in many directions. Three preachers came to aid Williams in his work, and Asbury took notice of their progress.

I met with brother Williams from Virginia; who gave me a great account of the work of God in those parts--five or six hundred souls justified by faith, and five or six circuits formed: so that we have now fourteen circuits in America; and about twenty-two preachers are required to supply them. Thus we see how Divine Providence makes way for the word of truth, and the Holy Spirit attends it. May it spread in power, and cover these lands.⁵⁷

By 1774 Williams had formed many societies including the first one in North Carolina, and he had planned a circuit to cover most of that colony. Then, in 1775, he married and accepted responsibilities as a husband which caused him to locate. He would have continued his work as a local preacher, but he died suddenly on September 26, 1775. Francis Asbury, who felt that marriage and preaching could not be combined, as is reflected in this journal entry, concluded: "Brother Williams died. The Lord does all things well: perhaps brother Williams was in danger of being entangled in worldly business, and might thereby have injured the cause of God. So he was taken away from the evil to come."⁵⁸ Two days later his mood had mellowed: "I ventured to preach a funeral sermon at the burial of brother Williams. He has been a very useful, laborious

⁵⁷Asbury, Journal and Letters, I, 153.

⁵⁸Ibid., p. 164.

man, and the Lord gave him many seals to his ministry. Perhaps no one in America has been an instrument of awakening so many souls, as God has awakened by him."⁵⁹ Robert Williams is remembered as the first Methodist preacher in America to marry, locate and die, and his contributions to the movement were important. In addition to his work in the mission field and in publishing, he converted many native preachers, notably Jesse Lee, and he acquainted the Reverend Devereux Jarratt with Methodism.

Jarratt was born in Virginia in 1732, and his parents, who were poor, were nominally members of the Church of England. Actually, he experienced little of religion while growing up. Although his formal education ended when he was twelve, Jarratt studied alone and became a teacher. His interest in religion increased when he read a book of George Whitefield's sermons, and he was soon converted by the New-light Presbyterians. Since ministers in the area were scarce, Jarratt began holding Sunday meetings to read sermons, and he soon decided to become a preacher himself. His earlier prejudice against the clergy and coldness of the Anglican Church disappeared as he continued to read about the institution, and this note appears in his autobiography: "I learned also that the two most zealous and indefatigable ministers in Europe, Wesley and Whitefield,

⁵⁹Ibid.

were members of the Church of England."⁶⁰

In October, 1762, Jarratt sailed to England for his ordination. On December 25, 1762, he became a deacon and on January 1, 1763, an Anglican priest. He remained in England for several months due to illness and a shortage of money, and he heard Wesley, Whitefield and other evangelicals preach. Then, he returned to America and took charge of the three churches in Dinwiddie County, Virginia, which made up Bath Parish. He remained in residence there until his death in 1801.

Jarratt believed in a religion that was personal and experimental, and he preached the necessity of conversion. Emotionalism was never a part of his services, and he did not approve of emotional outbursts in any religious meeting. In a time when many preachers tried to excite their audiences, few of the early Methodists, whether priests or laymen, used shouting and shaking as tools. In March, 1773, Robert Williams called on Devereux Jarratt to explain his presence in that area of Virginia and to express his continuing loyalty to the Church of England. Jarratt, who had been scorned by his fellow priests as an evangelical, welcomed Williams and offered his cooperation to the Methodists. Together they began a revival which finally brought the

⁶⁰Devereux Jarratt, "The Autobiography of the Reverend Devereux Jarratt," The William and Mary Quarterly, IX (July, 1952), 382.

Great Awakening to the South.⁶¹

From 1776 to 1783 Jarratt was one of the few ordained ministers in America who would administer the sacraments to Methodist groups. In fact, baptism had become so unusual for the Methodists that in 1782 he performed this rite for Adam Cloud who was already serving as a circuit preacher in North Carolina.⁶² Twenty-five Virginia counties and four in North Carolina (Halifax, Warren, Granville and Franklin) were on Jarratt's regular route, and the number of Methodists in his area increased from a few hundred to over four thousand during this period.⁶³ Jarratt's home was always open to the traveling preachers, and societies were encouraged in his parish. Francis Asbury gave him full credit in his conversations and his journal: "I am persuaded there have been more souls convinced by his ministry than by that of any other man in Virginia."⁶⁴

The schism of northern and southern Methodists which took place in 1779 did alienate Jarratt from the southerners who began administering the sacraments without being first ordained, but he was quickly reunited with them in 1780

⁶¹Gewehr, The Great Awakening, p. 137.

⁶²Asbury, Journal and Letters, I, 418.

⁶³William Warren Sweet, The Methodists, Vol. IV: Religion on the American Frontier (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1946), p. 8.

⁶⁴Asbury, Journal and Letters, I, 414.

when they dropped this practice. In 1782 he wrote Charles Pettigrew, an Anglican priest in North Carolina:

I was glad to hear of your attendance at a later Quarter-Conference and of the Friendship you show and the assistance you give to the Methodists. They are the only people, that I know of, whose labours are considerably blest to the salvation of souls; and they have given the most striking and indubitable Testimonies of their love and adherence to that Church of which you and I have the Honour to be ministers. They therefore claim a right to our Patronage, Countenance and Assistance. Some no doubt, may view us with evil Eye for so doing and we may forfeit the good opinion of the worldly wise and great. . . . But what of this? If we seek to please men we are not the servants of Christ. If we can do good or be a Means by our Counsel, Direction, or Aid of helping others to be useful in the work of promoting the best Interests of Mankind--can we live to better purpose.⁶⁵

The recipient of this letter was born in Pennsylvania, educated in North Carolina, and ordained in England in 1774. During the Revolutionary War he was one of the few Anglican clergymen in the North Carolina area. He corresponded and worked with the Methodist itinerants when this was possible.⁶⁶ It is unfortunate for the Anglicans that priests like Jarratt, and to a lesser degree Pettigrew, were so scarce in the colonies, for they could have possibly prevented the step that the Methodists took in 1784 which resulted in independent church status. When this break did come, Jarratt's criticism was sharp, for he had worked hard to supply the Methodists with their needs and to keep them

⁶⁵Sweet, The Methodists, p. 10.

⁶⁶Ibid., pp. 9-10.

within the English Church. Gradually, he was reconciled to the new Methodist Episcopal Church, and one of its bishops, Francis Asbury, preached his funeral sermon in 1801.

C. American Methodism Adopts the Annual Conference, 1773-1775

In June, 1773, Thomas Rankin, who was Wesley's assistant for America from 1773 until 1777, called for a meeting of the Wesleyan preachers in the colonies. This session is considered the first general conference of American Methodism, and the delegates who met in Philadelphia represented approximately 1,160 society members. At that conference only ten preachers were assigned in an area reaching from New York to Virginia. Robert Williams was stationed at Petersburg.⁶⁷ The conference was modeled after the one in Great Britain, and its power was only advisory. At this time John Wesley represented final authority in the entire Methodist movement. In the minutes an important question is posed and answered--should the Methodist preachers administer the ordinances? The rule adopted required the society members to attend the Anglican Church services and to receive baptism and communion there.

During 1774, according to an account written by

⁶⁷Minutes of the Methodist Conferences Annually Held In America. From 1773 to 1794, inclusive (Philadelphia: Henry Tuckniss, 1795), p. 7. See Appendix C, p. 137.

Devereux Jarratt, Robert Williams formed the first society in the colony of North Carolina. He and other Methodists "began to ride the circuit, and to take care of the societies already formed, which was rendered a happy means, both of deepening and spreading the work of God."⁶⁸ The American Conference of that year stationed seventeen preachers and required them to move every six months. Brunswick Circuit was established to include the old Petersburg Circuit and parts of North Carolina (Bute and Halifax Counties) which Williams had traveled. The Brunswick Circuit claimed 218 of the 2,073 Methodists in America, and it had three preachers.⁶⁹ This area was the center of Methodist activity for the next two years.

In May, 1775, a third annual conference was held in Philadelphia, and it stationed twenty preachers, an addition of three. The number of society members had increased from 2,073 to 3,148, and the Brunswick Revival had gained 600 of the converts.⁷⁰

⁶⁸ Devereux Jarratt, A Brief Narrative of the Revival of Religion in Virginia, in The Journal and Letters of Francis Asbury, ed. by Elmer T. Clark, J. Manning Potts, and Jacob S. Payton (3 vols.; Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1958), I, 209.

⁶⁹ Minutes of the Methodist Conferences, p. 10.

⁷⁰ Ibid., p. 14.

D. Political Tension Between Great Britain and the
American Colonies Influences Methodism, 1775

Following the Conference of 1775 Thomas Rankin and George Shadford toured some of the southern colonies. In July they were in North Carolina, but no record of their impressions or accomplishments is available. Wesley was pleased to receive word of their proposed tour and wrote:

In the country places I believe you will have the largest harvest, where they know little and talk little about politics. Their hearts are engaged with something better, and they let the dead bury their dead. I am glad you are going into North Carolina; and why not into South Carolina too? I apprehend these provinces would bear much fruit, as most parts of them are fresh, unbroken ground. And as the people are farther removed from the din of war, they may be more susceptible to the gospel of peace.⁷¹

Both Rankin and Shadford had been sent to America by the British Conference of 1772, but their manner and methods were quite different. Rankin was a strict disciplinarian with little common sense, and he constantly argued with Francis Asbury about the message and methods of Methodism. The latter complained to his fellow workers and in his journal:

Mr. Rankin keeps driving away at the people, telling them how bad they are, with the wonders which he has done and intends to do. It is surprising that the people are not out of patience with him. If they did not like his friends better than him we should soon be welcome to take a final leave of them.⁷²

⁷¹Wesley, Letters, VI, 143.

⁷²Asbury, Journal and Letters, I, 147.

The General Assistant was probably much as Wesley had been in Georgia, and he was as ill suited for his frontier mission.

George Shadford, on the other hand, was a favorite of the people he preached among, and William Warren Sweet feels he was "perhaps the most successful evangelist of all Wesley's missionaries to America."⁷³ He was born in Lincolnshire, England, to parents who were quite strict about the external duties of the Anglican Church. His religious feelings were not encouraged until he left home to join the army and heard a Methodist who preached rather than read. After having a conversion experience, he quickly joined a society and soon the itineracy. In 1772 he volunteered for America, and after three years of service in the North he was stationed on the Brunswick Circuit. Along with Robert Williams and Devereux Jarratt he made religion a central life concern for many people there, and he was so successful that the time limit for preachers was suspended so that he could be reappointed in 1776. Shadford was a loyal subject of George III, however, and in 1778 he returned to England as Rankin had in 1777.⁷⁴

Both missionaries had left the colony by November, 1775, when North Carolina volunteers first fought the

⁷³Sweet, Methodism in American History, p. 65.

⁷⁴Bucke, History of American Methodism, I, 137.

British in the battle over Norfolk, Virginia. It was becoming more difficult for the colonists to listen to the Methodist missionaries because they were Englishmen and were loyal to an English institution. Religion and politics could still be pursued independently, but tension between the colonies and Great Britain was casting a shadow over all areas of life. John Wesley was distressed by the situation, and in March, 1775, he had written to all his American preachers:

You were never in your lives in so critical a situation as you are at this time. It is your part to be peace-makers, to be loving and tender to all, but to addict yourselves to no party. In spite of all solicitations, of rough or smooth words, say not one word against one or the other side. Keep yourselves pure.⁷⁵

In April, 1775, when Francis Asbury heard of the fighting at Lexington and Concord he was still optimistic. "We have alarming military accounts from Boston, New York, and Philadelphia. Surely the Lord will overrule, and make all these things subservient to the spiritual welfare of the Church."⁷⁶ Then, as the year ended, John Wesley, who had been quite outspoken about the existing political tension in favor of the colonists, became critical of the Americans.

In "The Present State of Public Affairs," a pamphlet written in 1768, Wesley supported the growing opposition of the colonists to certain legislation. "I do not defend the

⁷⁵ Wesley, Letters, VI, 143.

⁷⁶ Asbury, Journal and Letters, I, 155.

measures which have been taken with regard to America: I doubt whether any man can defend them, either on the foot of law, equity, or prudence."⁷⁷ In the summer of 1775 Wesley was still sympathetic, and he wrote to Thomas Rankin to reassure him: " 'The preachers at the bottom of all this outcry?' No, indeed; nor any of the Americans. They are only the tools of men on this side the water, who use them for deadly purposes."⁷⁸ Much of his time was spent in attempts to prevent a revolution, and he tried to influence both sides. To the preachers in America he advised assuming the role of peacemakers:

. . .by prayer, by exhortation, and by every possible means, to oppose a party spirit. This has always, so far as it prevailed, been the bane of all true religion, more especially when a country was in such a situation as America is now. None but the God of almighty love can extricate the poor people out of the snare.⁷⁹

Setting aside caution he wrote to Lord Dartmouth, Secretary of State for the Colonies, because "silence in the present case would be a sin against God, against my country, and against my own soul." In this letter that would be forwarded to Lord North, the prime minister, he explained:

All my prejudices are against the Americans. For I am an High Churchman, the son of an High Churchman, bred up from my childhood in the highest notions of passive obedience and non-resistance.

⁷⁷Wesley, Letters, V, 379.

⁷⁸Ibid., VI, 173.

⁷⁹Ibid., 149-50.

And yet, in spite of all my rooted prejudice, I cannot avoid thinking (if I think at all) that an oppressed people asked for nothing more than their legal rights, and that in the most modest and inoffensive manner which the nature of the thing would allow.

But waiving this, waiving all considerations of right and wrong, I ask, Is it common sense to use force toward the Americans? . . . These men will not be conquered so easily as was first imagined. They will probably dispute every inch of ground, and, if they die, die sword in hand. . . . They are as strong men as you; they are as valiant as you, if not abundantly more valiant. For they are one and all enthusiasts--enthusiasts for liberty.⁸⁰

Finally, to influence those who were protesting and to urge their continued loyalty to George III, he wrote a pamphlet, "A Calm Address to the American Colonies." This never reached its destination because the ports were closed by the Americans, but over a hundred thousand copies were distributed in Great Britain and its contents were known to the colonists. It caused a great deal of controversy and revealed Wesley's changing attitude. In defending the pamphlet and stating his motive in publishing it, he explained:

There is no possible way to put out this flame or hinder its rising higher and higher but to show that the Americans are not used either cruelly or unjustly; that they are not injured at all, seeing they are not contending for liberty (this they had even in its full extent, both civil and religious); neither for any legal privileges, for they enjoy all that their Charters grant. But what they contend for is the illegal privilege of being exempt from parliamentary taxation;--a

⁸⁰ Ibid., pp. 155-57.

privilege this which no charter ever gave to any American colony yet.⁸¹

This stand taken by Wesley against the colonists' objective caused the American Methodists to despair. Although he continued to think that the fighting was chiefly caused by a small group of selfish men who influenced the masses, he had admitted that the British policy of taxation was legal and just. This, combined with the spread of fighting, cast a heavy shadow over the future of Methodism which Francis Asbury tried to dispel:

I . . . am truly sorry that the venerable man ever dipped into the politics of America. . . . It discovers Mr. Wesley's conscientious attachment to the government under which he lived. Had he been a subject of America, no doubt but he would have been as zealous an advocate of the American cause. But [and here is the crux of the matter] some inconsiderate persons have taken occasion to censure the Methodists in America on account of Mr. Wesley's political sentiments.⁸²

The outbreak of war and the desire for independence were unfortunate developments for those interested in the advancement of religion in America. Missionary activity declined, church construction ceased, congregations divided, and many denominations, especially the Anglican, lost members. The Methodists experienced these problems, and there were restrictions on their meetings and ministers. Some of the preachers who were Loyalists left openly or were smuggled out; others who were for independence joined the

⁸¹Ibid., p. 193.

⁸²Asbury, Journal and Letters, I, 181.

militia as chaplains or soldiers; a few who were conscientious objectors refused to bear arms or to take loyalty oaths. Many of the Methodists were persecuted in some fashion, by fine, by imprisonment, and by verbal or physical abuse. In spite of all this, it was a period of steady growth for the movement except in 1778 and 1780.⁸³ About eight thousand society members, fifty-eight preachers and twenty-seven circuits were added between 1776 and 1783, and most of this growth occurred in the South. There are several reasons for this gain and geographical shift: many Anglicans, located primarily in the South, were without a church for the first time, and Methodism was the most similar religious body; fighting in the South was light and the civilian population was not dislocated, so meetings could be held regularly; and finally, Methodist preachers worked diligently to overcome the prejudice of the people against their movement.

E. Early Methodist Preachers on the North Carolina
Circuits, 1776-1778

The first battle of the Revolutionary War in North

⁸³ <u>Year</u>	<u>Preachers</u>	<u>Circuits</u>	<u>Members</u>
1776	24	12	4921
1777	36	15	6968
1778*	29	15	6095
1779	49	21	8577
1780*	42	21	8504
1781	54	24	10,539
1782	59	27	11,785
1783	82	39	13,740

Compiled from Minutes of the Methodist Conferences, pp. 18-60.

Carolina was fought on February 27, 1776, at Moore's Creek Bridge, eighteen miles from Wilmington. The militia units trapped sixteen hundred Highlanders, captured some Tory officers, and seized many arms. When British reinforcements arrived in May and were informed of the earlier defeat, they quickly withdrew, and British troops did not return to North Carolina until 1780. Little bothered by the war, the Methodists and other religious groups in the state continued to gather in converts, and the patriots continued to push for independence.

On April 4, 1776, North Carolina's Fourth Provincial Congress met at Halifax to consider a formal break with Great Britain. The delegates drew up the Halifax Resolves on April 12 which concluded: "Resolved, That the delegates for this Colony in the Continental Congress be empowered to concur with the delegates of the other Colonies in declaring Independency, and forming foreign alliances, reserving to this Colony the sole and exclusive right of forming a Constitution and laws for this Colony."⁸⁴ The American Declaration of Independence was approved by the Continental Congress on July 4, 1776, and a constitution for North Carolina was adopted by the Fifth Provincial Congress on December 18, 1776. A Bill of Rights had been adopted the preceding day. Articles XXXI, XXXII and XXXIV of that constitution dealt with freedom of conscience and

⁸⁴ Saunders, ed., Colonial Records, X, 512.

religion. There was to be no union of church and state by compulsory attendance at religious worship or compulsory support of a religious institution. Furthermore, no clergyman could serve as a member of the General Assembly. However, no one who denied God, the truths of Protestantism of of the Bible nor one whose religious principles were a danger to the state was to hold a public office.⁸⁵ Thus the Anglican Church was disestablished. A few ministers and a few hundred members did make up a skeleton organization in North Carolina until peace was official between Great Britain and the American states.

The Methodists in America had held their fourth annual conference in May, 1776, at Baltimore. A total of 4,921 society members was reported, and twenty-four preachers were stationed. For the first time a circuit was drawn up for North Carolina, and three preachers were assigned to care for its 683 members.⁸⁶ The first, Isham Tatum, nicknamed "The Silver Trumpet", was a native of North Carolina, and this assignment in 1776 was his first. He traveled until 1781 when he married and located. There are no other biographical details available, and he was one of many who served briefly and was forgotten. Francis Poythress,

⁸⁵ Ibid., p. 1011.

⁸⁶ Minutes of the Methodist Conferences, p. 18. See Appendix D, p. 138.

who was active in Methodism for many years, was also assigned. Born in Virginia of wealthy parents, he was little concerned with the Church until Devereux Jarratt made him aware of sin. Almost immediately he entered the Methodist itineracy and was stationed on the Carolina Circuit. For the next eight years he preached in North Carolina and Virginia; then, in 1783 he crossed the Allegheny Mountains as a missionary to the southwest. For the rest of his life he alternated living in Kentucky and North Carolina, resting in the east to return to the west. His health was broken by his difficult assignments, and he was insane for a long period of time. Although he had been nominated for a bishopric in 1797 by Asbury, he died a lonely, miserable man in 1818.⁸⁷ Poythress' life illustrates some of the extreme difficulties of serving on the frontier as an itinerant.

Edward Dromgoole, the third preacher, was born in County Sligo, Ireland, in 1751. He was a Roman Catholic until his conversion to Methodism in 1770; then, he publicly recanted his former beliefs. In that same year he came to America and settled in Baltimore; there, his faith in Methodism was renewed by Robert Strawbridge. Dromgoole began to preach in Maryland in the spring of 1772, but he was not admitted to the Conference until January, 1774.

⁸⁷Bucke, History of American Methodism, I, 388.

Stationed on the Baltimore Circuit, he began meeting classes and preferred this to formal exhorting. During 1775 he worked with George Shadford in the Brunswick area, and in 1776 he was appointed to the Carolina Circuit. Here he was quite dejected, for "the war between England and this Country began to wear a very serious aspect. The work of the Lord had spread considerably, and it was very promising, if we had men to rise and cherish it."⁸⁸ His loyalty to America was never in question, for he took the oath of allegiance and fidelity in Virginia at his own request. It was his pleasure to read the Declaration of Independence from the pulpit on the day it was received in Halifax, North Carolina, and during the war he traveled without regard for his safety to perform his preaching function among soldiers and civilians.

At the Deer Creek Conference of 1777 Dromgoole's prominence was recognized by the preachers who selected him to serve on a committee of five which was to preserve the societies and keep them united after Rankin's departure. He carried out his responsibilities well and personally supplied Asbury with information about various decisions the committee made. He wrote of the 1778 Conference: "I felt as if we were like unto a parcel of orphans destitute of parents. No old Preacher to direct or guide us. The

⁸⁸Edward Dromgoole, Papers, University of North Carolina Library at Chapel Hill, p. 4.

cause of God was dear to many hearts, we were much united, and the Churches to the South was [sic] for the present supplied with Preachers."⁸⁹ From 1778 to 1783 Dromgoole had no regular appointment, and he traveled and preached only on special occasions. In December, 1782, he went with another Methodist preacher to the area around Edenton to form a new circuit which was named Camden. This experience led him to re-enter the itinerant ranks, but his ill health and the sickness of his family led him to retire a second time. He continued to serve as a local preacher, and in 1815 was ordained an elder by Asbury. When Dromgoole died in 1835, American Methodism lost one of its most valuable preachers.

Francis Asbury was most pleased with the Conference of 1777 which met in Hartford County, Maryland. He noted the progress of Methodism in his journal.

So greatly has the Lord increased the number of travelling preachers within these few years, that we have now twenty-seven who attend the churches, and twenty of them were present at this conference. Both our public and private business was conducted with great harmony, peace, and love. Our brethren who intend to return to Europe, have agreed to stay until the way is quite open. . . . Our conference ended with a love feast and watch night.⁹⁰

Throughout the year Devereux Jarratt did all in his power to keep the societies within the Church of England, and his

⁸⁹Ibid., p. 5.

⁹⁰Asbury, Journal and Letters, I, 239.

constant traveling made it possible for many people to partake of the sacraments at least occasionally. John Wesley, on the other hand, continued to write on political subjects and angered the American Methodists whom he referred to as "poor deluded rebels."⁹¹

Four preachers appointed by the 1777 Conference toured the North Carolina Circuit which had reported 930 members.⁹² Of Edward Pride nothing is known, and of Lee Roy Cole very little. Cole was born in Virginia in 1749 and educated for the Anglican ministry. At the age of twenty-six he heard of the Methodists and went seeking them. Here is his record of the encounter and its results:

Under his [unnamed traveling preacher] prayer my feelings were so awakened that, after he closed, I sat by him and put my arm around him. About three weeks after, I set out to seek the Lord. The Father of mercies was graciously pleased at a night meeting, between the hours of twelve and one, powerfully to convert my soul. From that time I walked in the sunshine of his love from day to day, from month to month, and from year to year.⁹³

George Shadford gave Cole a license to preach early in 1777, and a few months later the Conference appointed him to North Carolina. He was ordained a deacon and elder at the Christmas Conference of 1784, but he was suspended by the Conference of 1785 for misbehavior. He must have been

⁹¹Wesley, Journal, VI, 167.

⁹²Minutes of the Methodist Conferences, p. 21.

⁹³John Atkinson, Centennial History of American Methodism (New York: Phillips & Hunt, 1884), p. 373.

unjustly charged, for he was reappointed in 1786 and served until his death in 1830.

The other two men appointed, John King and John Dickins, were both born in England and educated there. King was converted by John Wesley and then disinherited by his Anglican family. He came to America on secular business but saw the need for preachers and stayed on without Pilmoor's permission.⁹⁴ He is credited with introducing Methodism to Baltimore while working unofficially with Robert Strawbridge and Robert Williams, but his first conference appointment, to New Jersey in 1773, came later. The 1777 appointment to North Carolina was his last as an itinerant, for in 1778 he settled near Louisburg, North Carolina, and practiced medicine; however, he continued to serve as a local preacher until his death in 1794. King is often remembered through a letter from Wesley which cautions him about screaming. This trait which distressed Wesley was an asset to King as an outdoor speaker.

How and when John Dickins arrived in America is not known, but in 1774, professing his new found religion, he joined a Methodist society in Virginia. Devereux Jarratt was a constant inspiration to him, and in 1777 Dickins asked to be appointed to a circuit by the Conference so that he could share his enthusiasm with others. The

⁹⁴Bucke, History of American Methodism, I, 93-94, 175.

Conference accepted him, and he moved to North Carolina. Dickins was one of the early spokesmen for a Methodist church which could ordain its own preachers and provide the sacraments; therefore, he was a leader in the break to come in 1779 and in the future development of Methodism. In 1780 he ceased traveling either because he had married or lost his voice, perhaps both. He remained active, raising funds for a proposed Methodist school, and his first two contributions for such an institution were from North Carolinians. In 1783 Dickins was readmitted as a preacher and sent to Wesley Chapel in New York to reorganize its congregation. He was the first preacher in America to hear from Thomas Coke of Wesley's plans for the ordination of laymen, and he was a leader at the Christmas Conference where he was ordained a deacon. Dickins is credited with suggesting the name Methodist Episcopal which was adopted by the new church during that session. In 1785 he traveled Bertie Circuit, North Carolina, and during the year edited and had published the first discipline for the Methodist Episcopal Church. In 1786 he was ordained an elder. Then, in 1787, he returned to New York as the first book agent for the Methodists. In June, 1789, he had an audience with President Washington to assure him of the Methodist Church's cooperation in the future. This is evidence of the esteem with which he was held among the Methodist preachers. Dickins died in 1798 of yellow fever, but the

work that he started in publishing and education was continued by the church he helped to form.⁹⁵

In 1777 Francis Asbury had been quite optimistic about the future of Methodism, but in 1778 the movement suffered a setback.⁹⁶ By this time all of the British missionaries except Asbury had left America, and he was in seclusion in Delaware. The native preachers who traveled were held in suspicion as British spies and often even imprisoned or persecuted. Freeborn Garrettson publicized a planned trip to Salisbury, North Carolina, and the night before his arrival a crowd burned the house where he was to lodge and almost killed the owner. When Garrettson did ride into town he was attacked by the crowd but escaped.⁹⁷ There were much worse cases. Philip Gatch, for example, was tarred and feathered, and during the struggle was blinded in one eye. Despite these occurrences those preachers who remained and were able continued to spread the revival.

The Leesburg Conference of 1778 had divided the North Carolina Circuit into three circuits, the Roanoke, Tar-River

⁹⁵"John Dickins," Dictionary of American Biography, 1928, V, 292-93.

⁹⁶During 1778 the number of preachers dropped from 36 to 29 and the number of society members dropped from 6968 to 6095. This was the first decline in the movement which had grown steadily since 1773. Minutes of the Methodist Conferences, pp. 21-23.

⁹⁷Bucke, History of American Methodism, I, 166.

and New Hope. Six men could not have adequately covered the territory involved, but only three Methodists were assigned to travel throughout the state. Two of them, William Glendenning and James O'Kelly, were members of the Conference, and Beverly Allen acted independently.

James O'Kelly's name is a significant one in Methodist history, for in 1792 he left the new church and founded the Republican Methodist Church which became the Christian Church. At this early stage, however, he was a hardworking itinerant. There is much discrepancy in the accounts of his early life, and North Carolina, Virginia and Ireland are given as his birthplace in various sources. It is known that he was converted at the age of nine, for he left this account: "My first mental alarm was not through the blessed means of preaching; but by the kind illuminations of the invisible Holy Spirit. I saw by this Divine Light, that I was without God and destitute of any reasonable hope in my present state."⁹⁸ Years later, he continued, God sent the Methodists to him, and in 1775 he entered the itineracy. During 1778 he worked diligently and laid the foundations of the New Hope Circuit in Orange, Durham, Chatham and Wake Counties.

O'Kelly's strong sense of independence was always a

⁹⁸W. E. MacClenny, The Life of Rev. James O'Kelly and The Early History of the Christian Church in the South (Raleigh: Edwards & Broughton, 1910), p. 19.

problem to those who directed the Methodist program in America. He was an early spokesman for the right of the Methodists to administer the sacraments, and at the 1782 Conference he refused to adhere to the old plan of receiving the ordinances within the Anglican Church. In 1784, at the Christmas Conference, he would not agree to submit to Wesley in matters of church government. Finally, in 1792, he split from the Methodist Episcopal Church because the bishop's powers were too great. In spite of all this Asbury always thought highly of him. The first meeting between the two took place in North Carolina in 1780 after the schism over the sacraments had been healed, and Asbury recorded this impression in his journal: "James O'Kelly and myself enjoyed and comforted each other: this dear man rose at midnight, and prayed very devoutly for me and himself. He cries, give me children or I die; but I believe no preaching or preacher will do much good at present."⁹⁹

O'Kelly was in the Wake County area during the Revolutionary period, and he stated that he served one army tour and hired a substitute for a second. His account of his wartime experience as a preacher is valuable:

After the travelling preachers fled from the South, for fear of danger, I labored and traveled from circuit to circuit in North Carolina, to feed and comfort those poor distressed sheep, left in the wilderness. Philip, whose surname was Bruce, helped me--through great perils. We

⁹⁹Asbury, Journal and Letters, I, 365.

judged it best for men in our business, to move as quietly as possible. I was taken prisoner by the Tories, and robbed; I was retaken before day, by Captain Peter Robertson, the great and noted Whig. . . .I was despised and very near famished for bread. At which time I resolved, through grace, to hold to my integrity till death. My honor, my oath--my soul were at stake; till at last, Providence offered me an opportunity, which I gladly embraced and narrowly escaped their hands.¹⁰⁰

O'Kelly had been appointed to North Carolina by the sixth annual conference of Methodists which met at Leesburg, Virginia, in May, 1778. The minutes of this session report a decline in preachers, from thirty-six to twenty-nine, and in membership, from 6,968 to 6,095. No new circuits were added to the fifteen already established.¹⁰¹ Furthermore, illness kept Asbury away, and there was no strong, experienced leader present. It was a disastrous year for any division within the movement, and yet there was a problem that had to be considered. At the previous conference it had been proposed that the Methodist preachers assume the right to administer the sacraments. This request evolved from the situation in most of the colonies, for there were few Anglican ministers still present, and the people were unhappy with their dependence on the English Church. Under Asbury's leadership the 1777 Conference had laid this over until 1778 hoping the war would end. When it came up again in the business of the 1778 Conference, a majority voted to

¹⁰⁰MacClenny, Life of O'Kelly, p. 37.

¹⁰¹Minutes of the Methodist Conferences, p. 23.

lay it over until 1779. This second delay only increased tension.

F. The Schism Over the Sacraments, 1779

In a journal entry dated January 28, 1779, Francis Asbury revealed his sympathy for and acceptance of the Revolution being carried on by the Americans. Yet his primary concern remained that of furthering religion in America. He wrote:

We had tidings of great troubles in the south as well as the north. The gathering cloud seemed to lower and threaten with great severity. O my God! I am thine: and all the faithful are thine. Mercifully interpose for the deliverance of our land, and for the eternal salvation of all that put their trust in thee. At present my way is hedged in by Providence; but the time may come when I shall be useful in the Church of Christ. This would afford me more satisfaction than all the riches of the east, with all the pomp and grandeur of empires, and all the pleasures that can gratify both the imagination and flesh.¹⁰²

Despite his loyalty to the American cause, Asbury wanted the Methodists there to remain under John Wesley's leadership as long as that was possible. A contemporary, Thomas Ware, explained this position of Asbury and of others who felt the same way:

They did believe that a divine interposition was manifest in the rise and spread of Methodism, and that Mr. Wesley was an extraordinary man, who was the chief instrument in the hand of God in this work. They therefore looked up to him with deference and respect, and cherished a fond hope that, by his counsel and instruction, means would be devised to

¹⁰² Asbury, Journal and Letters, I, 294-95.

invest them with all the privileges of a church,
in a way to continue the Methodists in both countries
one family.¹⁰³

If Wesley insisted, as he did, that the sacraments must be administered by ordained Anglicans, then Asbury insisted the same and invited such priests to use their churches or Methodist chapels for the services.

In 1773 the first annual conference of American Methodism had adopted a British rule which provided that Methodists would receive the sacraments only from ordained ministers whenever that was possible. Many Methodists in the colonies became unhappy with this arrangement because there were never enough clergymen to meet the needs of the people. After independence was declared, the situation worsened, for most English clergymen left the new nation which was in a state of war and turmoil. As a result, the people who remained had to do without their religious rites when they needed them badly. Some Methodists had a different reason for desiring a change of the 1773 rule. They wanted their own preachers ordained. They felt the Anglicans were too worldly to minister to those who had been truly converted. They believed that if their itinerants were called by God to preach, a task they thought to be primary, then surely God called them to baptize and hold communion also. Since Methodism had become largely a southern movement by 1779, most of the supporters of a new

¹⁰³Bucke, History of American Methodism, I, 192-93.

plan for the administration of the ordinances were in the South.

The Conference of 1778 had decided that its next meeting would be in May, 1779, at the Broken-back Church in Fluvanna, Virginia. It had also laid over a decision about changing the system for the ordinances, as had the Conference of 1777, hoping that the situation would resolve itself somehow in a year's time. On April 28, 1779, a preliminary conference called by Francis Asbury met at his place of retreat, Thomas White's in Kent County, Delaware. Without any formal authority to do so, Asbury had issued invitations to this meeting to all the northern preachers and a few southerners, those men who thought as he did about the sacraments and felt that he should control the Methodist movement. It is therefore not surprising that this conference confirmed Asbury as general superintendent, because of his age, his service, his original appointment by Wesley, and Wesley's later order to him to work with the other missionaries who arrived. By this action he became the acknowledged leader of American Methodism, a position he maintained until his death in 1816. This conference also upheld the 1773 rule concerning the administration of the sacraments. The ministers present elected William Watters as their representative to the southern conference which was to consider giving the right to administer the sacraments to unordained Methodist preachers. Watters was to announce the decisions

of the Delaware conference without trying to convince the southerners to take similar positions. Finally, the group meeting in Delaware agreed to meet again in 1780. This conference took these actions in order to remain loyal to the Church of England and to Wesley's position. Francis Asbury considered this to be a regular annual conference replacing the Virginia one to follow, because the Delaware Conference continued Wesleyan traditions. On the night of April 28, 1779, he wrote in his journal:

Our conference for the northern stations began at Thomas White's. All our preachers on these stations were present, and united. We had much prayer, love, and harmony; and we all agreed to walk by the same rule, and to mind the same thing. As we had great reason to fear that our brethren to the southward were in danger of separating from us, we wrote them a soft, healing epistle. On these northern stations we have now about seventeen travelling preachers. We appointed our next conference to be held in Baltimore town, the last Tuesday in April next.¹⁰⁴

The following week he noted:

I wrote to John Dickins, to Philip Gatch, Edward Dromgoole, and William Glendenning, urging them, if possible, to prevent a separation among the preachers in the south--that is, Virginia and North Carolina. And I entertain great hopes that the breach will be healed; if not, the consequences may be bad.¹⁰⁵

On May 18, 1779, the regular Conference, assuming the powers of the preceding annual conferences, met in Fluvanna, Virginia. The preachers present considered the problem of

¹⁰⁴Asbury, Journal and Letters, I, 300.

¹⁰⁵Ibid.

being without the ordinances and voted to take on the right to administer the sacraments; thus, they divided American Methodism. Since political and economic relations between Great Britain and America had already been broken, these men broke from the Church of England also, in order to provide for their spiritual needs. Philip Gatch, Reuben Ellis, James Foster and Lee Roy Cole were elected by the Conference as a presbytery. They ordained each other, and then the four ordained other preachers. Each who was ordained was authorized to administer the ordinances to other Methodists only. The influential men in favor of this plan included John Dickins, James O'Kelly, Francis Poythress and Isham Tatum.¹⁰⁶ People throughout the South rejoiced. Although the northerners worried about this separation and the weakening of Asbury's control, the southerners gained many converts and considered this an indication of God's approval. The following is a contemporary account by Edward Dromgoole of the Virginia meeting and the period that followed.

In the Spring 1779 there was a Conference held at the brokenback Church. . .chiefly the young Preachers from Virginia and Carolina composed it. We went on tolerably well at the beginning, untill certain pious, good hearted Men introduced the subject of ordination. They formed a Committee

¹⁰⁶ Most historians of Methodism consider this the regular conference. An exception is Nathan Bangs in A History of the Methodist Episcopal Church, 2 vols.; New York: Mason & Lane, 1838. He says it was irregular due to the absence of the general assistant.

for the purpose of ordaining Ministers, by imposition of hands. As soon as this new plan was adopted, I left the Conference and returned home. A division took place, not only among the Preachers, but among the People which continued about two years. I visited particular places where the members of Societies remained united to old Methodism, and had the assistance of Richard Ivey. I sometimes went to the Meetings of the newside, as it was then called, and endeavored to be on as good terms as possible with them. There were some pointed letters passed between the two parties, and the union of souls, as well as sentiments, was broken in a great measure.¹⁰⁷

Asbury, who praised Dromgoole as "hearty in good old Methodism,"¹⁰⁸ was not as kind to the southerners. On June 30, 1779, he wrote a prophecy in his journal which proved correct: "I received the minutes of the Virginia Conference, by which I learn the preachers there have been effecting a lame separation from the Episcopal Church, that will last about one year. I pity them: Satan has a desire to have us, that he may sift us like wheat."¹⁰⁹ In November, 1779, he wrote that he planned a tour of the South to see if he could bring some people back under his control.

I received a letter from Mr. Jarratt, who is greatly alarmed, but it is too late: he should have begun his opposition before. Our zealous dissenting brethren are for turning out of the society who will not submit to their administration. I find the spirit of separation grows among them, and fear that it will generate malevolence,

¹⁰⁷Dromgoole, Papers, p. 6.

¹⁰⁸Asbury, Journal and Letters, I, 363.

¹⁰⁹Ibid., p. 304.

and evil speaking: after all my labour, to unite the Protestant Episcopal ministry to us, they say, 'We don't want your unconverted ministers; the people will not receive them.' I expect to turn out shortly among them, and fear a separation will be unavoidable: I am determined if we cannot save all, to save a part; but for the divisions of Reuben, there will be great heart searchings!¹¹⁰

It is only fair to Asbury to state that his feelings about the sacraments did not grow out of or end with this schism which was a threat to his leadership. In 1772 he had talked with a German minister about the place of the ordinances in Methodism and had recorded: "I told him they did not appear to me as essential to salvation, and that it did not appear to be my duty to administer the ordinances at that time."¹¹¹ Then, in 1775, he considered a missionary tour to Antigua and wrote: "There is one obstacle in my way--the administration of the ordinances. It is possible to get the ordination of a presbytery; but this would be incompatible with Methodism: which would be an effectual bar in my way."¹¹² Again in 1780, after the schism was healed, he explained to Reverend M'Robert: "I think the want of opportunity suspends the force of duty to receive the Lord's Supper."¹¹³ And finally in 1782 he wrote to John Wesley:

¹¹⁰Ibid., p. 322.

¹¹¹Ibid., p. 54.

¹¹²Ibid., p. 149.

¹¹³Ibid., III, 25.

I reverence the ordinances of God; and attend them when I have opportunity; but I clearly see they have been made the tools of division and separation for these three last centuries. . . . If we preach ordinances to these people, we should add 'if they are to be had, and if not, there can be no guilt'.¹¹⁴

In 1779 two conferences had met, and both performed the regular duties of the American Conference. The Delaware Conference had not stationed any preachers in North Carolina or Virginia, but it did place twenty men to serve about six thousand society members elsewhere. The Virginia Conference added Mecklenburg Circuit to the three already established in North Carolina, and it assigned eight preachers to the state which reported 1,467 Methodists.¹¹⁵ James O'Kelly and John Dickins were returned. Of the group which had not worked in North Carolina previously, only Reuben Ellis is significant. He was a native of the state, but when he entered the itineracy in 1777 he went to Virginia and worked with Edward Dromgoole. When the controversy over the sacraments intensified in 1778, he sided with the innovators and in 1779 voted to take up the administration of the ordinances because the Anglican Church was dissolving. He was elected as one of the four presbyters, a position of importance; yet, in 1780, he attended the northern conference

¹¹⁴Ibid., p. 31.

¹¹⁵The minutes of both conferences are included in Minutes of the Methodist Conferences, p. 28, Delaware Conference and p. 33, Virginia Conference.

to try for a reconciliation. In 1785 Ellis was appointed a presiding elder over one of three districts in North Carolina. This office was established to assist the bishops, and as presiding elder over Wilmington, New River, Tar River, Roanoke, New Hope and Guilford Circuits, Ellis was in charge of all administrative details. He worked to further the Methodist Episcopal Church until 1796 when he married and died. He left this impression of the Yadkin Circuit in North Carolina which he traveled: "I am in a very rough part of the Country--The roads, in general, are exceeding bad--And the People, a few excepted, are rougher than the roads: and accommodations coarse enough--But I thank God, in general I enjoy tolerable health."¹¹⁶

In the fall of 1779 one of the most important American Methodist preachers entered the itineracy. He was Jesse Lee who was born of poor parents in Prince George County, Virginia, in 1755. His education and religious training were better than average probably because his father had been converted by Devereux Jarratt. In 1773 Lee was converted, and in 1774 he joined a society established by Robert Williams. Three years later he moved to North Carolina to help a widowed relative, and in these new surroundings he gained enough courage to speak out. He became a class leader, then an exhorter, and on November 17,

¹¹⁶As quoted by Sweet, The Methodists, pp. 132-33.

1779, he preached his first sermon. The site was in Halifax County, and his text was "Behold, what manner of love the Father has bestowed upon us. . . who knew him not" (I John 3:1-2). Lee was well received, and later in the year he became an itinerant on the Roanoke Circuit filling a temporary vacancy for John Dickins. He was too new to Methodism to take sides in the 1779 schism.

In 1780 the North Carolina militia was drafted, and Lee reported to his training center but refused to bear arms. Thus he became the first outspoken Methodist pacifist in America.¹¹⁷ At first he was imprisoned for disobedience, but when it was discovered that he was a preacher, he was allowed to hold a service while being guarded. It is thought that this was the first Methodist sermon preached in the Wake County area. The officer in charge of the unit was impressed with Lee and allowed him to drive a wagon rather than be a foot-soldier until he was excused from duty. From 1781 to 1785 Lee worked to set up new circuits and expand old ones in Virginia and North Carolina. Following the annual conference in 1785 he worked his way northward, and he is considered the pioneer of Methodism in New England. He made other contributions to the movement, including the rejection of many types of formalism, and it was Lee who persuaded Asbury to forego wearing the

¹¹⁷Grissom, Methodism in North Carolina, p. 75.
Also, Bucke, History of American Methodism, I, 167.

traditional vestments. Finally, he was the first American historian of Methodism, publishing in 1810 A Short History of the Methodists in the United States of America.

G. Francis Asbury Leads in Reunion, 1780-1782

The year 1780 began with American Methodism still divided. On April 24, 1780, the second conference of northern preachers met in Baltimore, Maryland, and Francis Asbury presided. It was first decided that the Methodists would continue in close connection with the Church of England as had been agreed in 1779. Next the conference took up social questions and agreed that slavery was contrary to the laws of God, man and nature. All Methodists were advised to free their slaves, and the traveling preachers were unconditionally told to set theirs free. The same conference declared that the distilling of grain for consumption was not to be approved of. Finally, the conference as a whole announced its disapproval of the step taken in Virginia in 1779 and its rejection of those southern preachers as Methodists in connection with Wesley. It concluded that a reunion of the two groups would be possible only if the southerners would agree to suspend their administration of the ordinances for one year and to meet with the northern preachers in Baltimore in 1781. A committee of three, Francis Asbury, Freeborn Garrettson and William Watters, was to carry this information to the southern conference. In the minutes of the April conference

stations in both North and South are given, and another circuit, the Yadkin, was added in western North Carolina. It is interesting that the northern conference felt it could make any demand on the southerners, for of 8,504 society members 7,808 were below the Mason-Dixon line.¹¹⁸

On May 9, 1780, the southern preachers opened their conference at Manakintown, Virginia, which is near present Richmond. Although the minutes of this meeting were not preserved, contemporary sources provide information about the proceedings. From Asbury's journal:

The conference was called. . . and I was permitted to speak; I read Mr. Wesley's thoughts against a separation: showed my private letters of instructions from Mr. Wesley; set before them the sentiments of the Delaware and Baltimore conferences. . . . After some time spent this way, it was proposed to me, if I would get the circuits supplied, they would desist; but that I could not do. We went to preaching; I spoke on Ruth; . . . there was some moving among the people. In the afternoon we met; the preachers appeared to me to be farther off; there had been, I thought, some talking out of doors. . . . We withdrew, and left them to deliberate. . . . After an hour's conference, we were called to receive their answer, which was, they could not submit to the terms of union. . . . The agents on both sides wept like children, but kept their opinions.¹¹⁹

In his manuscript Edward Dromgoole, who worked closely with Asbury for a reconciliation, explained that the society members in the South had grown used to their preachers giving

¹¹⁸ No minutes of the southern conference were kept for the official records of the Methodist Episcopal Church, so the above information is from the Minutes of the Methodist Conferences, pp. 37-39.

¹¹⁹ Asbury, Journal and Letters, I, 349-50.

them the sacraments and did not want to return to long periods of doing without them. Although Dromgoole disagreed with the southern plan, because it laid "a foundation for any number of laymen, whenever they were dissatisfied to form themselves into a new body, for the purpose of organizing a new Church,"¹²⁰ he understood the inadequacy of the northern alternative. When Asbury and Dromgoole returned to the conference on the following day to say good-by, they were surprised to learn that the preachers had agreed to the compromise offered. The southerners would suspend their administration of the ordinances for one year while Wesley was consulted; then, both groups would meet in Baltimore to resolve the problem. The conference was ended with a love feast. Actually, a decision on the ordinance question was postponed until the war was ended, and American Methodists received the sacraments from Devereux Jarratt and other willing Anglicans who toured the Methodist circuits.

Following the May meeting at Manakintown Francis Asbury decided to tour Virginia and North Carolina in an effort to heal bad feelings and to revive the spirit of religion. In his journal he wrote: "I see clearly that to press the people to holiness, is the proper method to take them from contending for ordinances, or any less

¹²⁰ Dromgoole, Papers, p. 8.

consequential things."¹²¹ Asbury entered North Carolina in June and spent two months traveling in twelve counties. His movements can only be traced approximately, and even then with difficulty, because his journal entries are so vague. This was the first of sixty-three trips to the state. His impressions varied from day to day and place to place. On June 22, 1780, in Franklin County he wrote:

There is a hardness over the people here: they have had the Gospel preached by Presbyterians, Baptists and Methodists; the two former appear to be too much in the spirit of the world; there is life amongst some of the Methodists, and they will grow because they preach growing doctrines.¹²²

Yet, the following day he reported: "I rode fifteen miles, preached, prayed, and sung near two hours; . . . I had too mean an opinion of Carolina; it is a much better country, and the people live much better than I expected from the information given me."¹²³ On June 25 he was depressed again: "I think these people must be awakened by judgments, for it appears the Gospel will not do it."¹²⁴ He complained of a lack of privacy, long distances to travel, insects, bad roads, poor entertainment, uncomfortable lodgings, and little rest. To make matters worse, his congregations were not attentive. "The subject was new, the people dead. . . .

¹²¹Asbury, Journal and Letters, I, 351.

¹²²Ibid., p. 359.

¹²³Ibid., p. 360.

¹²⁴Ibid.

There are evils here; the meeting was not solemn; the women appeared to be full of dress, the men full of news. These people are Gospel slighsters."¹²⁵ On later occasions he noted that the people "seem hardened, and no preaching affects them,"¹²⁶ and that "some were drunk, and had their guns in meeting."¹²⁷ A final problem for Asbury was the original cause of this tour, and in July he recorded: "I find the spirit of separation on account of the ordinances, is very high among preachers and people, but I hope it will be checked."¹²⁸ His recorded experiences in the state were probably shared in some degree by all the itinerants in America during the eighteenth century.

In 1781 two conferences were again held, one on April 16 in Delaware and one on April 24 in Baltimore, not because of any controversy but for the convenience of the preachers. This became a standard Methodist practice, and as Methodism grew so did the number of annual conferences. By 1785 three meetings were held. The northern conference, usually meeting in Baltimore, was considered the most powerful, and it could veto action taken by any other conferences. The official minutes of Methodism were taken

¹²⁵Ibid., p. 365.

¹²⁶Ibid., p. 368.

¹²⁷Ibid., p. 369.

¹²⁸Ibid., p. 367.

at the northern meeting, and things of importance from the other meetings were included.

Although Wesley's reply to a letter concerning the administration of the sacraments by unordained preachers had not been received at the time of the conferences, Asbury wrote that all but one preacher agreed to return to the old plan. The minutes reported twenty-five circuits, fifty-five preachers, and 10,539 society members.¹²⁹ Of the membership, 1,993 were North Carolinians, and nine preachers were sent to supply the five state circuits. Adam Cloud who was appointed to the Roanoke Circuit was not even baptized until January, 1782, and his preaching before his baptism is evidence of the need for a better means of providing the sacraments.

The conferences of 1782 met at Sussex, Virginia, in April and at Baltimore in May. Although the total number of Methodists was increased to 11,785, there was a slight decline in North Carolina's total. Twelve preachers, an addition of three, were sent to the five established circuits.¹³⁰ Asbury, who had toured the state in March, had been unfavorably impressed: "I preached to a large congregation, but I am afraid the word preached will not profit them. I spoke warmly for about an hour; there came

¹²⁹Minutes of the Methodist Conferences, p. 45.

¹³⁰Ibid., p. 55.

on a rain, and the people appeared to be more afraid of their saddles being wet than their souls being lost."¹³¹ Yet, his tours to unite the movement had achieved their purpose, and the conferences of 1782 drew up "a written agreement to cleave to the old plan in which we had been so greatly blessed."¹³² Asbury wrote in his journal: "I am persuaded the separation of some from our original plan about the ordinances will, upon the whole, have a tendency to unite the body together, and to make preachers and people abide wherein they are called: I feel abundant cause to praise God for what he has done."¹³³ The Baltimore Conference of 1782 chose Francis Asbury to preside over the entire movement, and it formally acknowledged its obligation to Reverend Jarratt advising the preachers "to consult him and take his advice in the absence of brother Asbury."¹³⁴

On May 10, 1782, in Virginia, Asbury heard that Great Britain had acknowledged the independence of the American colonies, and he thanked God. Almost a year later, while in North Carolina, he made this entry on the subject in his journal:

¹³¹Asbury, Journal and Letters, I, 423.

¹³²Ibid., p. 424.

¹³³Ibid.

¹³⁴Minutes of the Methodist Conferences, p. 55.

I heard the news that peace was confirmed between England and America. I had various exercises of mind on the occasion: and some for the worse. It may make against the work of God: our preachers will be far more likely to settle in the world; and our people, by getting into trade, and acquiring wealth, may drink into its spirit.¹³⁵

When he wrote to George Shadford who had returned to England, however, he was optimistic.

O America! America! it certainly will be the glory of the world for religion! I have loved and do love America. . . .O let us haste in peace and love, where we shall know, love, and enjoy God and each other, and all the differences in Church and State, and among private Christians, will be done away.¹³⁶

In September, 1783, John Wesley acknowledged the independence of America and wrote to the Conference that Asbury was "raised up to preserve order among you, and to do just what I should do myself, if it pleased God to bring me to America."¹³⁷ He explained his hesitation to take any action about sending missionaries until the new government was established, and he seemed quite willing to let American Methodism control itself.

H. Asbury Tours in North Carolina, 1783-1784

In May, 1783, the annual conferences met at Sussex, Virginia, and Baltimore. For the first time in six years

¹³⁵Asbury, Journal and Letters, I, 440.

¹³⁶Ibid., III, 29.

¹³⁷Bucke, History of American Methodism, I, 193.

there was no controversy over the sacraments. Slavery was an issue, however, and it was agreed to give the local preachers only one year to free their slaves. Unanimous motions were carried, one condemning drinking and a second declaring two days of fasting and thanksgiving for peace.

The Methodist movement was growing steadily, and the minutes report 13,740 members, seventy preachers and thirty-nine circuits. In North Carolina there were twelve circuits, twenty-four preachers and 3,127 society members.¹³⁸

Many men were assigned to the state for the first time in 1783, and others like Edward Dromgoole and Jesse Lee were returned. A major new circuit called Guilford was set up for the territory around Raleigh and present Greensboro. One important action taken by the Baltimore Conference directly involved North Carolina, for it set up the first Methodist school in America on the Yadkin River in Davie County. James Park was appointed the principal of Cokesbury School, and he began work on December 9, 1783. Although the school was abandoned sometime after 1794, it did function well for a decade, and its establishment was a significant step for the church.¹³⁹

Asbury made two trips to the state in 1783, and his

¹³⁸Minutes of the Methodist Conferences, p. 65.

¹³⁹William L. Grissom, "Some First Things in North Carolina Methodism," Historical Papers of the Trinity College Historical Society, IX (1912), 28.

comments do not reflect the growth of Methodism there which the Conference minutes record. Perhaps it was already easy to be on a society roll without changing one's outer or inner life, but neither Wesley nor Whitefield would have been pleased with this development. Near Louisburg he wrote: "I spoke at Green Hill's to a proud and prayerless people, many of whom were backsliders."¹⁴⁰ In the eastern counties all his impressions were critical: "I presume we had six or seven hundred people, inattentive and wild enough. . . . Spirituous liquor is, and will be, a curse to this people;"¹⁴¹ "I spoke in a tavern; the people seemed wild and wicked altogether;"¹⁴² "I preached in Edenton, to a gay, inattentive people."¹⁴³

During March, 1784, Asbury made another visit to the state, and his journal entries and letters give a better impression. "I have had great times in Tar River circuit; the congregations have been large and living, more so than in any circuit I have passed through since I crossed the Potomac."¹⁴⁴ In a letter to John Wesley requesting that he come to America, Asbury gave this account:

I came to Caswell, in North Carolina. Here

¹⁴⁰ Asbury, Journal and Letters, I, 439.

¹⁴¹ Ibid., p. 450.

¹⁴² Ibid.

¹⁴³ Ibid., p. 451.

¹⁴⁴ Ibid., p. 458.

are a few souls who love God: and it is in part a new-formed Circuit, there may be much good done. From Caswell I came to the Guilford Circuit, which lies up, and on both sides the Dan River. Here we had some revival of religion, and an ingathering of souls. The land is good, and may come to something great in time. But the present preachers suffer much; being often obliged to dwell in dirty cabins, to sleep in poor beds, and for retirement, to go into woods, but we must suffer with if we labour for the poor. . . . From thence I went to Tar River, and spent eight days there very comfortably. The congregations were large. Some have found the Lord; and others are groaning for redemption.¹⁴⁵

The 1784 conferences met at Sussex, Virginia, in April and at Baltimore in May. The membership had increased from 13,740 to 14,988, and most of the new converts lived in North Carolina. Eighty-three preachers were assigned, twenty-one in North Carolina, to forty-three circuits.¹⁴⁶ These conferences were concerned with the slavery question which had been discussed in 1780 and 1783. The preachers present agreed to: (1) turn out any society members who bought or sold slaves; (2) suspend local preachers who still held slaves, excepting those in Virginia who had a year to free them; and (3) employ no more as traveling preachers men who owned other men. The Methodists' emphasis on emancipation and their rules concerning slavery were not stressed in North Carolina, because freeing slaves except under special conditions was forbidden by colonial and state

¹⁴⁵Ibid., III, 33.

¹⁴⁶Minutes of the Methodist Conferences, p. 71.

law.¹⁴⁷ The minutes also state that any European preachers who were recommended by Wesley and who agreed to be subject to the American Conference and its General Assistant, Francis Asbury, would be received. The latter provision is evidence of the growing independence of the American movement. Finally, the 1784 minutes note that three annual conferences would be held the following year: at Louisburg, North Carolina; at Sussex, Virginia; and at Baltimore. Then the conferences of 1784 adjourned. None of the delegates realized that they would never convene again as a conference of societies within the Anglican Church.

¹⁴⁷The Emancipation Law of 1741 provided that a slave could not be freed except for meritorious services, and such services had to be judged and certified by the county court. This was in effect until 1777 when similar legislation was enacted by the state. The Methodists did not feel that they could encourage their society members to disobey this law; instead, they hoped to use their influence with the legislature to change the law. See J. S. Bassett, "North Carolina Methodism and Slavery," Historical Papers of the Trinity College Historical Society, IV (1900), 5.

The Establishment of the Methodist Episcopal Church

By 1784 it was obvious to John Wesley and to other Methodists in Great Britain and America that steps must be taken to organize and perpetuate the movement in the newly independent country. When the political authority of Great Britain had ended, ecclesiastical law had ceased also. The English bishops no longer had legal authority over religion in America, and so the few Anglican priests who remained no longer administered the sacraments. The Methodist preachers, still officially under the control of Wesley and within the Church of England, were not ordained, and so they could not provide the rites of the Church.

Wesley had earlier realized that such a situation would exist if Methodist laymen were not given the power to administer the ordinances. Before 1780 he offered one solution to this problem. It called for the ordination by the Bishop of London of Wesleyan preachers for America. These ordained ministers would remain permanently in America and shape Methodism there, but they would continue under the care of Wesley and would adhere to the Anglican Church. The acceptance of this alternative was always unlikely, however, for a majority of the clergy of the Church of England had resisted the Methodist revival from its beginning. Many of them refused communion to known Wesleyans and denied

the ministry of their fellow priest. His only recourse then seemed to be ordination by presbyters, the second order of clergy, a practice which had been used in ancient times by the Church at Alexandria.

Back in 1741 when Wesley first began allowing laymen to preach and to care for the societies, requests were made by these Wesleyans for their ordinations. When the Anglican bishops refused to consider uneducated men as potential priests, it was suggested that Wesley ordain them himself or that they ordain each other, as the southerners in America did in 1779. He refused this, since he believed in the three orders of clergy established by the Anglican Church. According to the canons of that institution, deacons, elders or presbyters, and bishops had distinct functions; only a bishop could ordain men for the priesthood. By 1746, however, Wesley could confess in his journal that scripture did not prescribe one form of church government.¹⁴⁸ By 1756 he had come to believe that bishops and presbyters were in essence the same order, and that they were separated only because of a bishop's administrative powers. He wrote to his brother Charles: "Read Bishop Stillingfleet's Irenicon or any impartial history of the Ancient Church, and I believe you will think as I do. I verily believe I have as good a right to ordain as to

¹⁴⁸ Wesley, Journal, III, 243.

administer the Lord's supper."¹⁴⁹ In the period that followed this change of belief, he continued to refuse to ordain his helpers because of his loyalty to the Church of England. To remain in the Church it was necessary to obey its ecclesiastical laws, and one of these provided that only a bishop could ordain. Therefore, he ruled out the possibility of illegal ordinations in a letter written as late as January 16, 1783. "In every possible way, I have advised the Methodists in general to keep to the Church. . . . If ever the Methodists were to leave the Church, I must leave them."¹⁵⁰ Wesley always felt that it might be possible to reshape Anglican traditions in new lands, but he never intended to do this in Great Britain. In 1772 he explained to a friend: "I am not to be a bishop till I am in America. While I am in Europe, therefore, you have nothing to fear."¹⁵¹

In 1780 in a letter to Dr. Robert Lowth, the Bishop of London, John Wesley expressed his frustrations which had been building up for years. His comments include some of the reasons that the Anglicans failed in America and a motive for the ordinations that Wesley would finally perform in 1784. It is amazing that he and the American Methodists had as much patience as they did and that a permanent break

¹⁴⁹ Wesley, Letters, VII, 21.

¹⁵⁰ Ibid., p. 164.

¹⁵¹ Ibid., V, 313.

did not occur sooner. In answering the Bishop's explanation for refusing to ordain any ministers for America, Wesley questioned the effectiveness of the three men already present in the country.

Suppose there were three score of those missionaries in the country, could I in conscience recommend souls to their care? Do they take any care of their own souls? . . . They are men who have neither the power of religion nor the form--men that lay no claim to piety not even decency.

Then he attacked the method of examining candidates for Holy Orders which was based on education rather than a desire for salvation. "I do by no means despise learning; I know the value of it too well. But what is this, particularly in a Christian minister, compared to piety?" Finally, he mentioned John Hoskins who had asked to be ordained and concluded:

Sometime since, I recommended to your Lordship a plain man, whom I had known above twenty years as a person of deep, genuine piety and of unblameable conversation. . . . Your Lordship did not see good to ordain him; but your Lordship did see good to ordain and send into America other persons who knew something of Greek and Latin, but who knew no more of saving souls than of catching whales.

In this respect also I mourn for poor America, for the sheep scattered up and down therein. Part of them have no shepherds at all, particularly in the northern colonies; and the case of the rest is little better, for their own shepherds pity them not. They cannot; for they have no pity on themselves. They take no thought or care about their own souls.¹⁵²

On September 1, 1784, John Wesley made a brief journal entry which reads--"Being now clear in my own mind, I took a

¹⁵² Ibid., VII, 30-31.

step which I had long weighed in my mind, and appointed Mr. Whatcoat and Mr. Vasey to go and serve the desolate sheep in America."¹⁵³ The significance of his action that day is not revealed, for what Mr. Wesley had actually done was to ordain "by the imposition of my hands, and prayer" two Methodist laymen as deacons.¹⁵⁴ On the following day Wesley, Thomas Coke and James Creighton, all ordained priests or presbyters of the Church of England, ordained Richard Whatcoat and Thomas Vasey as elders; then, Wesley and Creighton ordained Coke as superintendent of the work in America. As a superintendent his powers and duties were the same as those of a bishop in the Anglican Church. When these three newly-ordained men sailed for America, they brought their credentials signed by Wesley, a recommendation that Asbury be ordained as joint superintendent, and an abridgment of The Book of Common Prayer which Wesley had prepared. The British leader took a further step and wrote a public letter explaining his actions. He concluded:

If any one will point out a more rational and scriptural way of feeding and guiding those poor sheep in the wilderness, I will gladly embrace it. At present, I cannot see any better method than that I have taken.

It has, indeed, been proposed to desire the English bishops to ordain part of our preachers for America. But to do this I object: (1) I

¹⁵³Wesley, Journal, VII, 15.

¹⁵⁴Ibid.

desired the Bishop of London to ordain only one, but could not prevail; (2) If they consented, we know the slowness of their proceedings; but the matter admits of no delay. (3) If they would ordain them now, they would likewise expect to govern them. And how grievously would this entangle us! (4) As our American brethren are now totally disentangled both from the State and from the English hierarchy, we dare not entangle them again either with the one or the other. They are now at full liberty simply to follow the Scriptures and the Primitive Church. And we judge it best that they should stand fast in that liberty wherewith God has so strangely made them free.¹⁵⁵

The man that Wesley trusted to guide American Methodism in its "full liberty" while skillfully continuing its dependence on Wesley in major concerns was Thomas Coke. Born in Wales, the only child of wealthy parents and grandson of an Anglican rector, Coke was graduated from Oxford in 1768, received his Master of Arts degree and was ordained in 1770, and then ordained a priest in 1772. At this time he had no knowledge of experimental religion, yet five years later he was driven from his parish with the church bells ringing because of his fervent preaching without notes, his use of hymns and his group meetings. In 1775 Coke had been awarded his doctorate degree, and when he joined the Methodists in 1777 he was their most educated convert. He was an ambitious man, and he worked hard to spread Methodism in England, Ireland, the United States, the West Indies and East India. Coke traveled constantly, making nine trips to America in twenty years,

¹⁵⁵ Wesley, Letters, VII, 239.

and he died and was buried at sea in 1814.¹⁵⁶ He was the logical choice for the superintendency in America, because he was a priest and could administer the sacraments. In fact, he was the first Methodist preacher in America who had this right. Although circumstances made it necessary for him to share his authority with Asbury and the American Conference, he probably considered himself Wesley's equivalent in this country.

Neither Wesley nor Coke had expected Asbury to react as he did to their offer of ordination as joint superintendent for American Methodism. Both had assumed that he would accept gratefully and that Asbury and Coke would then make plans for the organization and development of the movement. It was also assumed that the Americans would adopt the British plan and set up a conference which implemented decisions rather than made them. Asbury, who had been in America since 1771, knew that men who had fought for and won political independence would not be dictated to from England about their religious affairs. He also realized that the rank and file of Methodists in America had little in common with the Church of England. The Anglicans had distrusted their enthusiasm and had tried to extinguish their revival; furthermore, the Church of England which had been established in many colonies had

¹⁵⁶The only available biography of Coke is by Samuel Drew, The Life of the Reverend Thomas Coke, Ll. D., New York: Soule and Mason, 1818.

used their money without meeting their needs. Therefore, when Asbury was presented with Wesley's plans by Coke, he and the other American preachers present insisted that a special conference of preachers convene to consider the future and the possibility of an independent episcopal church. He noted in his journal on the day that he met Dr. Coke:

I was shocked when first informed of the intention of these my brethren in coming to this country: it may be of God. My answer then was, if the preachers unanimously choose me, I shall not act in the capacity I have hitherto done by Mr. Wesley's appointment. . . . It was agreed to call a general conference, to meet at Baltimore the ensuing Christmas; as also that brother Garrettson go off to Virginia to give notice thereof to our brethren in the south.¹⁵⁷

Asbury was wise enough to realize that the result of this conference would most likely be an independent church under his direction, and he was aware of the responsibility involved. On November 26, 1784, he wrote:

I observed this day as a day of fasting and prayer, that I might know the will of God in the matter that is shortly to come before our conference; the preachers and people seem to be much pleased with the projected plan; I myself am led to think it is of the Lord. I am not tickled with the honour to be gained--I see danger in the way.¹⁵⁸

The conference which convened on December 24, 1784, and adjourned on January 3, 1785, was known from the beginning as the Christmas Conference. The result of these

¹⁵⁷Asbury, Journal and Letters, I, 471-72.

¹⁵⁸Ibid., pp. 472-73.

sessions was the establishment of the first nationally organized church in the United States. Although no official minutes of the conference were preserved, a great deal is known about it. Asbury's journal reveals only the name that was chosen, the orders of clergy decided upon, the dates of his ordinations, and the election of Coke and himself as superintendents. Other accounts go into greater detail.¹⁵⁹

Sixty of the eighty-one Methodist preachers in the country were present, and most of them were young men quite willing to break with traditions and build anew. On the first day a majority voted for independent church status and for the administration of the ordinances. They placed decision-making power in a conference which was to meet annually as it had since 1773, but they adopted a motion to obey Wesley's commands in all matters of church government which was not rescinded until 1787. Later, the Christmas Conference adopted the name Methodist Episcopal for its new church. It agreed on a discipline to be composed of questions and answers and on the use of The

¹⁵⁹Ibid., 474. Also, Atkinson, Centennial History, pp. 34-50 gives biographical studies of the preachers present. Other works consulted include: Jesse Lee, A Short History of the Methodists in the United States of America (Baltimore: Magill and Clime, 1810), pp. 94-95; Bucke, History of American Methodism, I, 230; William Warren Sweet, Men of Zeal: The Romance of American Methodist Beginnings (New York: Abingdon Press, 1935), p. 174; and Jno. J. Tigert, A Constitutional History of American Episcopal Methodism (Nashville: Publishing House of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South, 1908), pp. 225-35.

Sunday Service of the Methodists in North America which Wesley had sent. It further agreed to a regulation on slavery which provided that Methodists who did not free their slaves within a year would be denied communion and that those who bought or sold slaves would be expelled. Virginia and North Carolina society members were temporarily excepted from the slavery restrictions. Twenty-five Articles of Religion were adopted as part of The Sunday Service, and they contained the major beliefs of the Anglican Church. Three orders of clergy were set up (superintendents, elders and deacons) with duties like those in the Church of England. Sixteen preachers were elected to orders, and four of them were ordained at that time. Finally, the Conference launched a program of missions, sending three preachers to foreign parts. Never did the men meeting at Baltimore forget that they were servants of God, and there was religious worship before and after each business session. When the Conference adjourned on January 3, 1785, the Methodists who had had preachers, meeting houses and societies for years now had churches and ordained clergymen who could administer the sacraments.

The first annual conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church met in Louisburg, North Carolina, the place designated by the 1784 Conference of Methodist Societies for its first session. It was held at the home of Green Hill who was a

Revolutionary War major, a local preacher, a prosperous farmer, and a man with political influence. He had served in the Provincial Congresses of 1774, 1775, and 1776 and had served later as state treasurer. Four annual conferences were held in his Franklin County home before he moved to Tennessee in 1799.¹⁶⁰

This first conference, which convened on April 19, 1785, was one of three to be held that year, and it represented the 9,063 Methodists in Virginia, North Carolina and South Carolina. Superintendents Asbury and Coke were present as were host Hill and seventeen other preachers including John King, Jesse Lee, Philip Bruce and Reuben Ellis. Beverly Allen was ordained a deacon and an elder at Louisburg, and these were probably the first Methodist ordinations in the state of North Carolina. The thirty-one circuits represented were grouped together under the direction of the available elders, and this practice marks the beginning of the office of presiding elder. There was some controversy over the slavery question which was a special problem for southern Methodists. Superintendent Coke who was a vigorous spokesman for the antislavery movement supported the legislation adopted by the Christmas Conference. During the examination of candidates, he questioned the approval of Jesse Lee as a circuit preacher,

¹⁶⁰ L. S. Burkhead, Centennial History of Methodism in North Carolina (Raleigh: John Nichols, 1876), p. 75.

since Lee urged a more cautious approach to emancipation in the South. Having lived in Virginia and North Carolina, Lee feared that insisting on immediate freedom for the slaves would cause a division among the Methodists and would weaken the position of the Negro. A rather heated debate followed, but Coke ended it with an apology for his hasty judgment and Lee was accepted by the Conference. A petition to the North Carolina legislature was drawn up by those present, and it requested that an act be passed which would allow people who wished to free their slaves to do so.¹⁶¹ The minutes of the meetings held at Louisburg, Sussex and Baltimore are published as one document, for decisions were made by all Methodist preachers after issues were debated at each conference and votes taken. This official record for 1785 states the reasons for the separation of the Methodists from the Anglicans, lists the circuits and the appointments of preachers, and estimates the number of American Methodists at 18,000.¹⁶²

Thus, the first annual conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church followed the practices of the thirteen previous conferences while establishing itself as part of

¹⁶¹Two works treat different aspects of this conference. For statistics see Bucke, History of American Methodism, I, 253 and 478; for the controversy on the slavery question see Leroy M. Lee, The Life and Times of the Rev. Jesse Lee (Charleston, S. C.: John Early, 1848), p. 159.

¹⁶²Minutes of the Methodist Conferences, p. 76.

the governing body of the new church. North Carolina, one of the last original states to be traveled by the early Methodists, was the site of its first official meeting as an independent denomination. It is suitable that this took place in the South, for the Methodists there had done the most to bring about the establishment of a national, self-sufficient church.

Conclusions

This treatment of the introduction of Methodism into North Carolina and its early growth in the colony and state is of historical value, because the topic has been long neglected and the information is scattered in many sources, some not easily obtained. The material was presented chronologically because this method is easiest for reference and because it best shows the interaction of political and religious developments.

By examining the steady increase of Methodist society members in a restricted area it is possible to illustrate how the missionaries worked on the frontier. They entered a relatively unchurched area and made religious services more easily accessible. The preachers lived as the people lived, spoke in a manner readily understood, and organized small groups to continue the work they began. Flexibility was a characteristic of early Methodism, and it was a necessity on the frontier. By explaining the success of the Wesleyan movement in a colony, one can point out the failures of the Anglican Church there. Established late in North Carolina, the Church of England was never really effective, and reasons for this are given. Also, by emphasizing the period from 1772 to 1785, this paper treats the reactions of several North Carolina Methodists to the

Revolutionary War. It is surprising to know that Methodism was introduced when anti-British feelings were so high, and it is interesting to see how the movement grew during a time of crisis.

North Carolina and Virginia preachers led the Methodists who broke away from Anglican traditions in the schism of 1779. Since this conflict over the sacraments was the major problem of the Methodists in America during their formative years, it is necessary to understand their thinking. This paper presents their views. Furthermore, their acceptance of new practices in 1779 was a warning of the independence to come in 1785, and it must have influenced both Wesley and Asbury.

North Carolina was the seventh colony to be toured by the Methodists, yet by 1784 it was producing more converts than any other state. From it Methodism spread westward to Tennessee and beyond. In North Carolina the first conference school in America was established in 1783, the first annual conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church was held in 1785, and that same year the first Discipline for the Methodists in the United States was drawn up. Certainly the development of Methodism is significant in the history of the state, and events which took place in North Carolina were important in the successful growth of the Methodist movement.

Bibliographic Essay

Historical treatments of American Methodism are numerous, but a majority of them are nineteenth or early twentieth century publications. Quite often the authors were Methodist ministers, hardly objective and untrained in historical research, and the publishing house was usually church-supported. Therefore, to explore Methodism during the colonial period primary sources should be used when this is possible. Secondary sources must be weighed carefully and checked against the existing records, for much of the information gathered is contradictory. Some of the older works and most of the more recent studies contain valuable material.

The most useful general survey for this paper was The History of American Methodism, edited by Emory Stevens Bucke. Published in three volumes in 1964, it is a thorough treatment of the topic, and it covers the years from 1736 to 1844 in Volume I. The volume entitled The Methodists from William Warren Sweet's series Religion on the American Frontier, 1783-1840 is also significant, for it contains valuable source materials; however, little attention is paid to the introductory period of Methodism, and the only pertinent information for me was that taken from the Papers of Edward Dromgoole. Three older studies are important:

Jesse Lee's A Short History of Methodists in the United States of America (1810) is a general survey which reprints much from the early conference minutes; Abel Stevens' History of the Methodist Episcopal Church in the United States of America (1865) is quite good on the introduction of Methodism in America by Philip Embury and Robert Strawbridge; and Jno. J. Tigert's A Constitutional History of American Episcopal Methodism (1908) has a clear explanation of the schism of 1779.

Available treatments of the Methodist movement in North Carolina are of little value. Although the title is deceiving, A. M. Chreitzberg's Early Methodism in the Carolinas (1897) is really concerned with South Carolina. The first and only volume of a History of Methodism in North Carolina from 1772 to the Present by W. L. Grissom was published in 1905. It traces Methodism in the state through 1805, but it is biased toward the Methodists, has poor footnotes and no bibliography. It does contain some interesting diary or journal excerpts, but it is almost impossible to trace the sources using his references. The Centennial of Methodism in North Carolina by L. S. Burkhead was published in 1876; this work reveals biographical material about the early preachers in the colony, but its primary purpose was to praise the denomination's progress. Bishop Elmer T. Clark published Methodism in Western North Carolina in 1966, but this is a condensed

reference book for church libraries. Three papers done for the Trinity College Historical Society were relevant: in "Some First Things in North Carolina Methodism" (1912), W. L. Grissom gives details about the first Methodist conference school in America which was situated on the Yadkin River; in L. L. Smith's "Methodism in Albemarle County" (1912), a 1729 letter is included as evidence of the absence of clergymen in the province; and William K. Boyd includes pertinent membership figures in "Methodist Expansion in North Carolina after the Revolution" (1919).

Certain time periods important in this study have been treated in detail. Wesley W. Gewehr in The Great Awakening in Virginia (1930) and Charles H. Maxson in The Great Awakening in the Middle Colonies (1920) dealt with the Methodists' participation in that movement. Other studies cover other developments. The Christmas Conference of 1784-85 is emphasized in John Atkinson's Centennial History of American Methodism (1884), and biographical studies of the preachers present are given. The background of various controversies over the ordinances is given in Constitutional and Parliamentary History of the Methodist Episcopal Church (1912) by James M. Buckley. Finally, Robert Leonard Tucker's The Separation of the Methodists from the Church of England (1918) is valuable for an understanding of the 1785 division by American Methodists.

There are a great many biographical treatments of the early leaders of Methodism, but few of the men who introduced the movement into North Carolina have been given individual attention. Sketches of the Pioneers of Methodism in North Carolina and Virginia (1884) by Matthew H. Moore is actually a collection of newspaper articles written by a Methodist minister to eulogize other Methodist ministers. Also of interest are John P. Lockwood's The Western Pioneers or Memorials of the Lives and Labours of the Reverend Richard Boardman and the Reverend Joseph Pilmoor (1881) which treats their early stay in America and W. E. MacClenny, The Life of Rev. James O'Kelly (1910), which points out many of the early disagreements among Methodist preachers.

Due to the scarcity of trustworthy secondary sources, it was necessary to approach this topic through printed primary sources. A great deal of attention has been paid to Methodist preachers, major and minor, for their lives reveal the growth of the movement. The journals and letters of early Methodist leaders and a few contemporary biographical sketches actually give a clearer impression of Methodism in colonial America than the secondary works available. By examining The Journal and Letters of Francis Asbury (1958), The Letters of the Reverend John Wesley, A. M. (1931), The Journal of the Reverend John Wesley (1938), and A Select Collection of Letters, 1763-1770 (1772) by George Whitefield it was possible to construct a bare outline

of Methodist development in North Carolina. "The Autobiography of the Reverend Devereux Jarratt" written in 1806 and Minton Thrift's Memoir of the Rev. Jesse Lee with Extracts from his Journals (1823) gave further details. This skeleton was then filled in by using original records, particularly the unprinted papers of Edward Dromgoole at The University of North Carolina Library in Chapel Hill and the Minutes of the Methodist Conferences Annually Held in America from 1773 to 1794 (1795) available at Duke University. By combining pieces of information gathered from many scattered sources it was possible to construct this treatment of the introduction of Methodism into North Carolina and its growth for a decade following.

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Appendix A

The General Rules of the Methodist Episcopal Church

There is only one condition previously required of those who desire admission into these societies--"a desire to flee from the wrath to come, and to be saved from their sins." But wherever this is really fixed in the soul it will be shown by its fruits.

It is therefore expected of all who continue therein that they shall continue to evidence their desire of salvation, First: By doing no harm, by avoiding evil of every kind, especially that which is most generally practiced, such as:

The taking of the name of God in vain.

The profaning the day of the Lord, either by doing ordinary work therein or by buying or selling.

Drunkenness, buying or selling spirituous liquors, or drinking them, unless in cases of extreme necessity.

Slaveholding; buying or selling slaves.

Fighting, quarreling, brawling, brother going to law with brother; returning evil for evil, or railing for railing; the using of many words in buying or selling.

The buying or selling goods that have not paid the duty.

The giving or taking of things on usury--that is, unlawful interest.

Uncharitable or unprofitable conversation; particularly speaking evil of magistrates or ministers.

Doing to others as we would not they should do unto us.

Doing what we know is not for the glory of God, as:

The putting on of gold and costly apparel.

The taking of such diversions as cannot be used in the name of the Lord Jesus.

The singing those songs, or reading those books, which do not tend to the knowledge or love of God.

Softness and needless self-indulgence.
Laying up treasures upon earth.

It is expected of all who continue in these societies that they shall continue to evidence their desire of salvation. Second: By doing good; by being in every kind merciful after their power; as they have opportunity, doing good of every possible sort, and, as far as possible, to all men:

To their bodies, of the ability which God giveth, by giving food to the hungry, by clothing the naked, by visiting or helping them that are sick or in prison;

To their souls, by instructing, reproving, or exhorting all we have any intercourse with; trampling under foot that enthusiastic doctrine, that "we are not to do good unless our hearts be free to it."

By doing good; especially to them that are of the household of faith or groaning so to be:

Employing them preferably to others;
Buying one of another;
Helping each other in business.

By running with patience the race which is set before them, denying themselves, and taking up their cross daily; submitting to bear the reproach of Christ, to be as the filth and offscouring of the world; and looking that men should say all manner of evil of them falsely, for the Lord's sake.

It is expected of all who desire to continue in these societies that they shall continue to evidence their desire of salvation.

Third: By attending upon all the ordinances of God; such are:

The public worship of God.
The ministry of the Word, either read or expounded.
The Supper of the Lord.
Family and private prayer.
Searching the Scriptures.
Fasting or abstinence.

These are the General Rules of our societies; all of which we are taught of God to observe, even in his written Word, which is the only rule, and the sufficient rule, both of our faith and practice.

Doctrines and Discipline of The Methodist Church,
1964, pp. 38-40.

Richard Harrison*	Fall, 1769	Left January, 1770
Joseph Pilmoor	Fall, 1769	Left January, 1770
John King (volunteer)	Spring, 1770	Local preacher in N. C. at death, 1774
Francis Ashbury*	October, 1771	Went as itinerant, 1772
Richard Wright	October, 1771	Left January, 1772
George Farley (volunteer)	June, 1773	Left 1774
Thomas Rankin*	June, 1773	Left 1777
George Shadford	June, 1773	Left 1778
William Glendonning (volunteer)	1774	Became Unitarian
James Deapster	1774	Became Presbyterian
Warren Rodde	1774	Left 1777

* Indicates Wesley's general assistants in the American colonies.

Appendix BThe Wesleyan Missionaries

<u>Name</u>	<u>Date Arrived</u>	<u>Service Ended</u>
Robert Williams (volunteer)	Fall, 1769	Died an itinerant, 1775
Richard Boardman*	Fall, 1769	Left January, 1774
Joseph Pilmoor	Fall, 1769	Left January, 1774
John King (volunteer)	Spring, 1770	Local preacher in N. C. at death, 1794
Francis Asbury*	October, 1771	Died as itinerant, 1816
Richard Wright	October, 1771	Left January, 1774
Joseph Yearby (volunteer)	June, 1773	Left 1774
Thomas Rankin*	June, 1773	Left 1777
George Shadford	June, 1773	Left 1778
William Glendenning (volunteer)	1774	Became Unitarian
James Dempster	1774	Became Presbyterian
Martin Rodda	1774	Left 1777

* Indicate Wesley's general assistants in the American colonies.

Appendix CThe Annual Conferences, 1773-1784

<u>Date</u>	<u>Place</u>	<u>Circuits Reported</u>	<u>Preachers</u>	<u>Society Members</u>
1773	Philadelphia	5	10	1160
1774	Philadelphia	10	17	2073
1775	Philadelphia	10	20	3148
1776	Baltimore	12	24	4921
1777	Hartford Co., Maryland	15	36*	6968
1778	Leesburg, Va.	15	29	6095
1779	Kent Co., Del. Fluvanna, Va.	? ?	20 ?	? ?
1780	Baltimore	?	?	8504
1781	Choptank, Del. to Baltimore	25	55	10,539
1782	Sussex, Va. to Baltimore	?	?	11,785
1783	Sussex, Va. to Baltimore	39	70	13,740
1784	Sussex, Va. to Baltimore	43	83	14,988

* Asbury's journal noted only 27 preachers .

Information taken from Minutes of the Methodist
Conferences.

Appendix DThe North Carolina Circuits, 1776-1784

<u>Date</u>	<u>Name or Area</u>	<u>Preachers Assigned</u>	<u>Members Reported</u>
1776	Carolina	3	683
1777	North Carolina	4	930
1778	Roanoke Tar River New Hope	3	?
1779	3 continued Mecklenburg added	8	1,467
1780	4 continued Yadkin added	8	1,866
1781	5 continued	9	1,993
1782	5 continued	12	1,606*
1783	5 continued Holston added Guilford added Caswell added Marsh added Salisbury added Bertie added Pasquotank added	24	3,127
1784	12 continued Wilmington added	21	3,836

* This is an estimate rather than an accurate count.
 Information taken from Minutes of the Methodist
 Conferences.